

# WEST NEWBURY OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

To the Board of Selectmen:

The Open Space Committee (OSC) met regularly during the 2018 fiscal year. This report summarizes its accomplishments and challenges from July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019.

## Town Report 2019

**Preservation of Brown Spring Farm and River Road Conservation Reservation:** Working with Essex County Greenbelt, the OSC conducted several site walks of both properties in Spring 2019. The walks served to earn residents' support for Greenbelt's acquisition of 31 acres on River Road and the placement of an Agricultural Restriction on the 10-acre Brown Spring Farm property, with sale of a portion to a farmer. The OSC and Greenbelt were co-applicants for two Community Preservation Act (CPA) grants to facilitate the land acquisition, and May Annual Town Meeting voters overwhelmingly approved the funding requests. The River Road transaction was completed in September 2019, and the year ended on a high note with preservation of Brown Spring in December.

To ensure that the Town can fund important future projects eligible for CPA grants, the OSC lobbied to retain the local 3% surcharge on real estate bills. Annual Town Meeting voters defeated a proposal to lower the surcharge to .5%.

**Completion of the 2018 Open Space and Recreation Report (OSRP):** The years-long effort to update the town's 2009 OSRP was completed in June. At 172 pages, the comprehensive report to the state Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) inventoried land use, zoning, natural resources, as well as accessibility of land and recreational activities. Results of a 2016 OSC survey were included in the OSRP, notably finding that residents strongly favor protecting town land from development. All Massachusetts communities must have an accepted OSRP in order to apply for state funding and grants.

An ambitious OSRP Action Plan will guide the efforts of the OSC in the coming years. Creating access to town open space for those with limited ability is a primary goal. The OSC identified two existing trails that could be made more accessible without major work: along Mill Pond and off Coffin Street into Riverbend. In June, the OSC also launched a program to inform the public about invasive plant species with a workshop that took participants on site to identify and learn about invasive plants.

**Bicentennial Walks:** In honor of the Town Bicentennial, the OSC scheduled the first of four trail walks in April and May. The plan to visit the Withers Conservation Area and Riverbend at different times of the year to observe seasonal changes served as a template for future trail walks throughout the Bicentennial year. The OSC deployed Signup Genius as an online tool for registering participants and communicating details about the walks.

**Website Transition:** The town Open Space online presence transitioned from a private site to one that integrates all West Newbury government information. The private site was shuttered in December 2018.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Open Space Committee,

*John Dodge*, Chairman

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