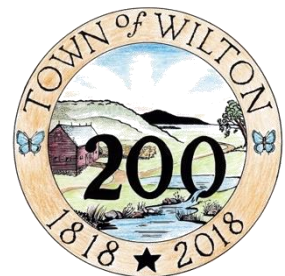


TOWN OF WILTON OPEN SPACE, RECREATION AND PATHWAYS PLAN 2020 UPDATE



PLAN SUMMARY

**Town of Wilton
Saratoga County, New York
September 2020**



Town of Wilton

Open Space, Recreation and Pathways Plan 2020 Update

**Town of Wilton
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Special thanks to Larry S. Gordon for his insight and guidance on the plan and his years of dedicated service to the Town of Wilton.

Assistance Provided By:



***In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.
- John Muir***

WHY WE NEED AN ACTION PLAN

Scenic vistas, exceptional habitats for threatened and endangered species (including one of the Northeast's largest populations of the Karner blue butterfly), many miles of established trails and significant opportunity for increased pathway connectivity, and vibrant outdoor recreational spaces provide a rich natural environment for the Town of Wilton's residents and visitors.

The Town of Wilton continues to grow, a trend that has fluctuated but remained positive each decade since 1930. The Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) projects the population of the Town will continue its growth from 16,173 in 2010 to 19,652 in 2030, a change of nearly 22 percent. This population change gives the Town of Wilton the largest projected growth in the next decade of any municipality in the county. This prediction indicates that the large demand for additional housing will likely continue and result in the conversion of open space lands to residential uses unless there are more effective strategies in place to protect these areas.



The Town of Wilton is at risk of development from its proximity to other expanding population centers and suitable land for sprawling suburban development. The town's natural landscapes are also an attractive resource for the increasing number of young adults and families as well as the populations nearing retirement age.

With the projected population changes in both overall numbers and makeup, it is vital that the Town of Wilton moves forward this plan's recommendations to not only ensure that open space and agriculture land are protected from development, but that the changing recreational needs of the town are met as well. This plan is broken up into three main concerns for the town: Open Space, Recreation, and Pathways.

This Action Plan summarizes findings, goals and necessary action steps to accomplish the goals detailed in the 2020 Update to the Town of Wilton Open Space, Recreation and Pathways Plan (OSRPP). The OSRPP update is the fulfillment of one of the priority recommendations from the Town of Wilton Comprehensive Plan adopted in 2004 and updated in 2015. With many changes occurring in the Town since the 2007 adoption of the OSRPP, an update was warranted and commissioned by the Town Board.

The purpose of the OSRPP update is to establish a strategy for the preservation of the diverse agricultural, historical, recreational, and scenic open space lands that strongly influence the quality of living in the Town of Wilton. The residents of the community, through expression in the adopted Comprehensive Plan, have acknowledged and endorsed the role of open space and the contributions these resources make to daily life in the Town. A balanced approach to future use of land in the Town is important and proper. Appropriate measures implemented now will allow for managed growth and preservation of the Town's natural resources in the future.

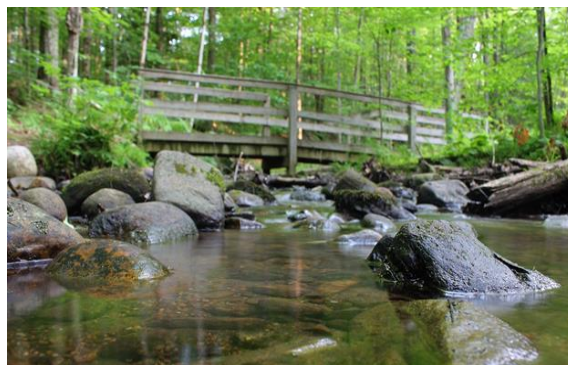
The intent of the OSRPP update is to provide a means of connecting open space areas, residential areas, recreation areas, service providers, Town services, and commercial areas with a town-wide system of pathways that allow for multiple forms of transportation to move effectively throughout the Town. The system will also have public health and quality of life benefits by providing opportunities for exercise, recreation, and connections with the natural world.

Through public outreach efforts, the OSRPP update incorporates the concerns and hopes of this community to establish a vision to guide future planning and development in the town. The plan reflects a history of commitments to protect open space and historic resources and expand upon a variety of active and passive recreation opportunities through building upon the successes of previous planning initiatives at the local, regional, and statewide levels.

A COMMITMENT TO OPEN SPACE, CONNECTIVITY AND RECREATION

Since its formation in 1818, the Town of Wilton has shown strong commitment to enhancing and preserving open space, recreational venues and pathways. Significant efforts to identify and protect open space, recreational venues and pathways over the past several decades demonstrates the Town's commitment to its open space and recreational resources and the connections between them. The most significant recent efforts include:

- Improvements to the Subdivision and Zoning Regulations and inclusion into the Town Code, including adoption of a Conservation Subdivision Design Ordinance (CSD);
- Continued Implementation of the Master Plan for Gavin Park;
- Continued updates of the town-wide multi-use trail system; and
- Continued support for Wilton Wildlife Preserve & Park.



The OSRPP is directly supported by public comments made during the development of the 2015 Town Comprehensive Plan and is closely associated with other recent open space preservation and recreation planning efforts. To oversee the 2020 update, the Town appointed an advisory committee consisting of Town Board members, town officials and residents. They were instrumental in the plan development process including formulating strategic actions to achieve the desired results of permanent preservation of natural resources and unique features.

GOALS FOR OPEN SPACE

Open space is a broad and complex consideration. Within the context of the preservation goals for Wilton, open space refers to natural terrestrial features such as meadows, steep slopes, forested areas; aquatic features including lakes, streams, ponds, and wetlands; heritage areas including historic landmarks and buildings; geological features including



hydric soils and aquifer recharge areas, vernal pools; and consideration of scenic views. The values of open space are as diverse as the types of open space listed above.

Preservation of open space is especially important considering the presence of the Saratoga Sand Plains ecosystem in the Town of Wilton. This unique ecosystem supports one of the largest population of the endangered Karner blue butterfly in the Northeast. Management efforts also benefit other species including the state threatened frosted elfin butterfly and Blanding's turtle, state endangered Persius duskywing butterfly, Eastern hog-nose snake, Eastern spade-foot toad, blue spotted salamander, and other species identified by the NYS Department of Environmental conservation (DEC) as being Species of Greatest Conservation Need.



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Open space conservation is addressed through the Town's environmental and land use regulations. The Town's conservation subdivision law requires developers to utilize a conservation approach when subdividing lands of 10 or more lots. Open space along the Adirondack Northway is protected from development through the Northway Corridor Overlay District (NCOD). Natural areas and their timber, soil and streams are managed and protected by the Town's Timber, Soil and Stream Regulations.

GOALS FOR RECREATION

The Town has experienced a considerable increase in population. As a result, the Town has a significant number of pre-school and school-aged children. According to the 2010 Census, approximately 27 percent of the Town's population is 19 years of age or younger. This statistic indicates a strong need for recreation facilities of both an active and passive nature.

Furthermore, it is a stated goal of the Town's Comprehensive Plan, "to provide sufficient opportunities and facilities for both active and passive recreation activities." Active recreation includes types that require support equipment and facilities such as fields, courts, or tracks for the conduct of an organized game or match. Passive types are activities that are less reliant on structured facilities or competitions and include walking, jogging, trail running, dog walking, on and off-road cycling, hiking, snowshoeing, skating, cross country skiing, fishing, hunting, and bird watching.



GOALS FOR PATHWAYS

OSRPP envisions a town-wide system of pathways that effectively links open space areas, residential areas, recreation areas and parks, points of interest, schools, service providers, and commercial areas. The strategy relies on a long-term, phased approach to piecing the links together through timely consideration during the development review process and optimal use of relevant state and federal

transportation and funding programs. When complete, the Town's trail system will provide safe connections to residential and commercial areas via multiple alternative transportation routes affording seasonal access and movement for people of all ages and abilities for walking and bicycling.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION STEPS

The Town of Wilton Comprehensive Plan 2015 Update established a general town-wide goal "to conserve, improve, and protect our Town's natural resources, viewsheds and open space including wildlife habitat, that contribute to the diversity, character, aesthetics, environmental quality, economy, and general health, safety and welfare of the community." The OSRPP update outlines actions for the Town to implement to accomplish this goal. The Town worked with the community and its partners to identify the highest priority actions for open space, recreation and pathways in Wilton. The Town of Wilton Comprehensive Plan 2015 Update also provided a set of recommendations for specific planning areas throughout the community. The 2015 update was adopted by the Open Space Committee and incorporated into the following recommendations and action steps for the Town of Wilton.

Open Spaces

1. Continue to identify areas of the Town landscape that are suitable for open space preservation. The areas identified should be based on prioritized considerations that reflect the public's enjoyment and ecological function of the space preserved.
2. Review and update existing Town regulations (i.e. zoning, site plan, subdivision) as necessary to achieve a balance between the adequate protection of resources and the fiscal and social needs of the Town and its residents. Evaluate potential land preservation mechanisms such as easements, land acquisition, purchase of development rights, and the use of incentive zoning to achieve the transfer of development rights. Utilize incentive-based tools for open space preservation coupled with regulatory measures implemented through zoning, development guidelines, and a conservation development subdivision review process.
3. Develop a management strategy to inventory and catalogue all open space parcels for the Town. Develop a single form to inventory the existing open space parcels for their recreation and environmental education potential. Consider the required investment, desired uses and activities for open space lands, specific attributes and constraints of existing open space areas, appropriate management techniques, funding available, and human resources available to undertake management of the parcels inventoried and catalogued.
4. Accept open space parcels that are offered for donation, based on a thorough review by the Planning Board and Town Board. The Town should have the first refusal for land donation throughout the Town. Should the Town reject a parcel offered for donation, New York State, Saratoga PLAN, the Open Space Institute, or some other entity should consider it.
5. Consider fee simple purchase of lands or easements on a case-by-case basis. Once a determination has been made that the parcel under consideration meets the criteria for priority open space, a method for owning, managing and financing the acquisition must be established prior to the final decision on acquisition. Factors to consider include cost, method of funding, means of ownership, the cost of upkeep, the approach to maintenance, and the long-term source of funding to cover maintenance and management costs.

6. Ensure enough funds are budgeted for existing and continuing program and land management. Furthermore, it is recommended that multiple funding sources be prioritized and pursued. Priority should be given to applying for available federal, County and State programs as listed in this trail plan. As a next priority, private donations to fund preservation efforts would be possible.
7. Implement protection options such as easements, tax abatements, transfer of development rights, and purchase of development rights programs, incentive programs, outright purchase, and other funding mechanisms.
8. Encourage existing farms to take part in agricultural protection programs in Saratoga County through the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program and other opportunities.

Water Resources

9. Adjust the stream corridor buffer standard to be measured from the shoreline, rather than the center of the waterway. This will add a more defining measuring point and increase the amount of protected areas. Standards should focus on the quality of the stream corridor, steepness of the slope, conditions which may contribute to erosion, and habitat value. Buffers and lot clearing restrictions around areas with physical constraints may be warranted and should be established on a case-by-case basis.
10. Review the Stream Corridor Overlay District requirements and update as necessary to work toward protecting the integrity of natural stream systems to the maximum extent possible. Incorporate these protections as necessary into site plan and subdivision regulations.
11. Minimize the potential impacts of erosion and sedimentation through strict compliance with the most recent State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (SPDES) General Construction Permit requirements for stormwater management and pollution prevention.

Scenic Resources

12. Identify, map and protect high-quality scenic resources.
13. Utilize Visual Overlay Districts for highly sensitive areas to address road setbacks, cut and fill, lighting, reflective glass, height, structures that could be considered intrusive such as billboards or cellular towers, and site layout/design.
14. Require through site plan review and SEQR that all projects describe the potential impact on any locally significant visual resources that are identified in this document. During the site plan review procedure for review of commercial and industrial projects the Planning Board should utilize best practices to lessen the visual impact including screening, relocation on site, disguise, low profile, and sensitive lighting. The Zoning Board of Appeals should utilize similar standards in the review of variances, particularly variances relating to signs.
15. Improve compliance with the Northway Corridor Overlay District. The intent is to protect natural areas on either side of the Northway from development. A set of compliance guidelines should be

compiled and imposed during subdivision and/or site plan review by the Planning Board. These guidelines should include realistic enforcement and penalties with requirements for rehabilitation, reclamation, and restoration of said lands.

Recreation

16. Support ongoing projects at Gavin Park and Camp Saratoga. Consider additional locations for recreation. Consider implementing and supporting bike parks and multi-use areas.
17. Establish minimum recreation facility standards for active and passive recreation related to the size of individual development projects.
18. Complete a long-range plan for a compatible but diverse set of outdoor recreational uses at Camp Saratoga. Work with WWPP on this plan and with NYS DEC and Saratoga County to incorporate their existing trails into the plan for passive recreation.

Pathways

19. Invest in a clear and simple comprehensive all-season trail map for visitors. Identify all Town parks, LGLC trail preserves, state land trails, and county trails. Include length of time for the hike, the level of difficulty, and appropriateness of the trail for different ages and abilities. Illustrate the extent of the trail system, rules and regulations, and the location of different types of trails and attractions.
20. Create a standardized informational, wayfinding and interpretive signage plan that makes it simple for people to find and navigate local trails.
21. Develop standards for the design of trailheads. Incorporate parking and trail registers where appropriate.
22. Negotiate access agreements with property owners at key connectivity points, and to trail destinations such as open space, park, and recreation lands with future connections to destinations such as schools, shopping areas and employment centers.
23. Negotiate rights to use Saratoga County forestlands for the development of special purpose trails such as cross-country skiing.
24. Develop use and safety guidelines and regulations for trails throughout the Town and conduct a public outreach and education program to advise Town residents.
25. Adopt a trail management strategy for off-road trails. A *trail use ordinance* could help the trail managing agency protect trails. The ordinance should contain the rules and regulations of the trail system and should be posted at trailheads. It is recommended that the standards for municipal trailheads be compatible with the standards of the State Department of Environmental Conservation.
26. Consider and prioritize paving projects to improve on-road connections to trail.

27. Establish and adopt a detailed plan for on- and off-road connections adjacent to Northway crossings.
28. Consider use of park and recreation fees for maintenance of Town trails.
29. Require private developers to connect future subdivision and residential development plans to trails.

Wilton Wildlife Preserve & Park

30. Support WWPP and its mission. Ensure that actions relating to land use at the local and regional levels are consistent with the program's identified goals.
31. Continue compliance with NYS DEC and other state and federal standards, regulations and requirements for projects located within the WWPP study area to ensure protection of critical habitats and resources.

