

OPEN SPACE

The people of Kingston have voiced their desire to preserve open space in Town. In 1999, residents of Kingston came together for a two-day community profile meeting. During the meeting, participants listed the qualities they currently admired and those they wanted to preserve in Town. Over the course of those two days, citizens said they wanted to: maintain the rural character of the town, preserve working farms, protect woodlands, maintain a significant percentage of the town as “green space,” identify parcels of land that can be encouraged to be preserved, protect the town’s aquifers, and initiate warrant articles for capital reserve funds for purchase of conservation easements and/or open space. The citizens also voiced their desire to develop a master plan to preserve water resources, open space, trails, village character, and the development of the Route 125 corridor as it relates to the town’s character.

In 2007, Kingston adopted its Master Plan. The Master Plan states that there is an abundance of open areas within the town and that several factors are at play when one considers the extent of undeveloped land still found in town. Much of the land that has remained undeveloped has remained so due to the land stewardship philosophies of the landowners. Many of these owners have taken advantage of the Current Use Program. In 2004, 151 properties were enrolled in the Current Use Program involving 4,341 acres of land, or approximately one third of the total acres in Town. This means that a large portion of the town is not being developed due to a conscious decision of the property owners. However, one must understand that the Current Use Program is voluntary and that property owners can develop these parcels at any time.

The town has been successful in recent years in permanently protecting land using both Federal and State programs. The town has also utilized zoning ordinances in the protection of open space. In recent years, the citizens of Kingston have endorsed the protection of open space by voting for the appropriation of significant funds for use in protecting open space permanently. However, long-term protection of properties in Current Use cannot be assumed by Town planners. As stated in the Town Master Plan, the preservation of these areas is important for many reasons and, therefore, the Town should establish a process or evaluation program for prioritizing the purchase of these properties.

In the fall of 2008, members of the Friends of Kingston Open Space (FOKOS) met with the Planning Board and Conservation Commission to form an Open Space Committee with the purpose of developing an Open Space Plan to document ways to preserve and enhance our open spaces and to examine the development that is now taking place in our town, so as to protect the character of Kingston in the future. Since its inception in 1998, FOKOS has spearheaded the acquisition of funds for land purchases by asking the voters to set up the Land Acquisition Capital Reserve Fund. Working with the Town, FOKOS has also sponsored warrant articles requesting additional funds on an annual basis. The Town has overwhelmingly supported these articles. This Open Space Plan will be incorporated into the Town Master Plan with the intention that it may be used as a key tool for future Town planners. The plan includes recommendations for the permanent protection of priority open spaces in Town and the suggested methods to accomplish this. The process to do this includes continuing to:

- Gain an understanding of the local importance of the existing open space and natural resource base;
- Identify key open space and resource areas and interconnections between them;
- Identify and contact landowners of the key undeveloped land and informing them about the Town's conservation and open space objectives;
- Prioritize areas to be protected through acquisitions of land, development rights, or agreements for conservation or partial development; and
- Set aside conservation funds through various means to fund priority including the Land Acquisition Capital Reserve Fund.

1.0 CRITERIA FOR OPEN SPACE PROTECTION

The Open Space Committee developed set of criteria listed below for use in selecting specific areas of town for targeted conservation efforts.

Recreation and public access – to ensure that residents continue to have places for healthy recreation like walking, hiking, biking, bird-watching, snowmobiling, etc.

Natural beauty/scenic areas – to enhance aesthetic qualities and recreation values of the landscape

Historic and Archeological areas and sites – to maintain historic resources of the town and educate residents about their significance in Kingston's development

Contiguous to other protected areas – to expand protected lands to increase habitat diversity, wildlife travel corridors, etc.

Habitat diversity – to ensure that locations with special ecological features remain that way and that threatened or exotic species are not adversely affected and to join complimentary habitats of special importance into larger areas

Riparian areas (located on banks of river or stream) – to ensure recreational resources and wildlife habitat

Wetlands – to preserve natural floodwater storage areas and prevent pollution of surface waters

Active agriculture and prime soils – to provide food, rare diversity, recreational opportunities

Community character – to ensure that the town retains its rural character and charm

Water supply and water quality – to protect aquifers to ensure existing groundwater supply and recharge areas are not adversely affected by development

Air quality – to reduce impacts on air quality in the town and region through conservation of forestlands and reductions in pollution sources.

Wildlife travel corridor – to allow natural wildlife movement from one protected area to another

Potential for sustainable income – income potential for improvements to the parcel (forest management) or food production positive to local economy

Forestland – to provide potential for sustainable income and filtration of pollutants from the air. Forests remove CO₂ from the atmosphere. NH forests take up the equivalent of 25% of the states man-made CO₂ annually.

2.0 CRITERIA FOR SELECTING/PRIORITIZING SPECIFIC PARCELS

Quality of the parcel – meets a substantial number of the criteria for open space protection

Potential impact of development – size of development potential in terms of number of new homes possible

Imminence of development – Parcel is currently being considered for development or is among a number of parcels that are being considered

3.0 SPECIFIC TARGETED AREAS – areas of Kingston identified as possessing a number of the qualities identified in the Criteria for Open Space Preservation –

Northwest Corner (East of Rte. 107) – recreation and public access/ contiguous to other protected areas/ natural beauty/historic/habitat diversity/ surface water/ wildlife travel corridor/ potential for sustainable income.

This area contains approximately 700 acres of substantially contiguous, undeveloped land which is a high priority for conservation. The land contains a large un-fragmented block of open space in proximity to other protected parcels in Danville and Brentwood. It contains a mix of productive upland forests and interconnected wetlands making the area a very productive wildlife habitat. This area supports a variety of wildlife including moose, deer, beaver, coyote, and snowshoe hare. An approximately 30 acre open water, beaver influenced wetlands complex lies within the property, with fingers extending throughout and is a significant resource for wildlife, especially migratory waterfowl. There are many logging roads throughout the area which would provide easy access for passive recreation. The property contains an historic and picturesque mill site at one end of the pond. The Little River (north) flows through the property and into the Exeter River, which is the main source of drinking water for the town of Exeter. Part

of the land abuts an already established Town Forest of approximately 25 acres. The property is almost directly across the road from other protected lands which could serve as a substantial wildlife corridor to the Rockrimmon Area and lands west of Great Pond. A large part (approx. 525 acres) of the land is held by two land owners.

Northeast Section (Non-commercial zoned parcels Northeast of Rte.125 and along the Route 111 corridor towards Exeter) – habitat diversity/ active agriculture/ surface water/ wildlife travel corridor/ potential for sustainable income

This area contains approximately 300+ acres, currently being used for agricultural purposes including production of crops and pasturing of farm animals. This is the largest area of land in town used for that purpose. These farmlands serve as a source of wildlife habitat as do the lands bordering the Little River and the large tracts of forested land. The Little River (north) flows from the northwest corner of town through the property and into the Exeter River which is the main source of drinking water for the town of Exeter.

Southwest Section –recreation and public access/ natural beauty/ contiguous to protected lands/ habitat diversity/ wildlife travel corridor/ potential for sustainable income

A 110+ acre Town Forest in this area is surrounded on three sides by approximately **XX** acres of undeveloped land. This area consists primarily of productive upland forest. Preservation of these additional acres would enhance the availability of public access and habitat diversity and provide for additional sustainable income from timber harvesting. The current Town Forest has had a number of successful timber harvests over the years and additional harvests could be conducted on additional lands that may be acquired. The Town forest currently has a series of marked trails for recreation and these could be expanded to allow greater recreational use. The area contains varied and interesting terrain as well as a perennial stream.

Rockrimmon Area and West of Great Pond – recreation and public access/ natural beauty/ contiguous to other protected areas/ habitat diversity / surface water/ wildlife travel corridor/ potential for sustainable income

This area contains approximately 500 acres of substantially contiguous undeveloped land which is predominantly productive forest lands. Much of the land is a large un-fragmented block of open space that ties this section of Kingston to a substantial (approx. 250 acres) piece of currently undeveloped land in Danville. Approximately 250 acres is held by a single landowner. The land abuts the 47 acre Rockrimmon State Forest which is noted for its picturesque vista and scenic beauty. The property is directly across the road from other protected lands which could serve as a substantial wildlife corridor to the large un-fragmented parcel in the northwest corner of town. This area serves as part of the watershed for Long Pond in Danville and Halfmoon Pond and Great Pond (and subsequently the Powwow River and Powwow Pond) in Kingston. Significant development in this area would have a substantial negative effect on these surface waters. This area supports a variety of wildlife including moose, bear and coyote. There are many logging roads that provide public access for recreation.

Powwow River Area – recreation and public access/ natural beauty/contiguous to other protected areas/ habitat diversity/ surface water/ wildlife travel corridor/

This has been an area targeted for preservation by a number of conservation organizations including the Kingston Conservation Commission, Friends of Kingston Open Space, Nature Conservancy, Land and Community Heritage Investment Program and the Society for Protection of New Hampshire Forests. Much of the area has been protected but there are still a number of key parcels that are not under conservation easement. This large open area, including the river and fen systems, provides critical habitat to a variety of rare species of plants, birds and reptiles. It provides an excellent opportunity for a variety of passive recreation activities both on land and in the river.

4.0 HOW TO COMPLETE PROTECTION OF CONSERVATION PRIORITIES AND COSTS

4.1 Techniques for Permanent Land Conservation in Kingston

The Committee recommends that permanent conservation of the priority areas be accomplished through the use of **conservation easements** as the primary tool. Land under conservation easement remains in private ownership and on the property tax rolls but is prevented from being developed. Conservation easements can be held by the town or other land conservation organizations. The Committee recommends that conservation easements be held by qualified non-profit conservation organizations that have the expertise and resources to carry on the responsibility in perpetuity of assuring these lands are not developed. Conservation easements can be acquired through purchase or donation from landowners.

All the tools to be used to permanently conserve the areas listed above include:

Conservation easement acquisition by town or conservation organization –
Priority Method

Donation
Bargain sale
Purchase

Fee acquisition by town or conservation organization

Donation
Bargain sale
Purchase

Planning/zoning/regulation

While planning/zoning/regulations are viable sets of tools to conserve some areas as part of development projects, they should not be considered as a substitute for the use of conservation easements to permanently conserve land in Kingston. Despite this, we recommend that the Planning and Zoning Boards learn about the Priority Areas for permanent land conservation

identified in this report and urge developments in those areas to use conservation development techniques and conservation easements as part of approval processes. It should be noted that the Priority Areas identified fall in most zoning categories in Kingston.

4.2 Estimated Cost and Funding Sources

While specific boundaries have not been developed for the areas recommended for permanent land conservation in Kingston, these areas collectively total in the hundreds of acres. Some conservation easement acquisitions will occur through donations made by landowners. Some of the conservation easements already in existence in Kingston came about in this fashion. Others require funds to purchase along with acquisition costs associated with these real estate transactions (surveys, title searches, legal fees, etc.),

In the future, it is reasonable to conclude that today's conservation easement acquisition costs will only continue to escalate. In order to accomplish the goal of permanent land conservation that is articulated in this report, the town should continue to set aside funds each year in the Land Acquisition Capital Reserve Fund as it has for the past several years.

Kingston Land Use/Coverage	1962		1974		1998		2005	
	acres	%	acres	%	acres	%	acres	%
Residential	672.6	5	1110.9	8.3	1896.6	14.1	2266.4	16.9
Industrial/Commercial	57.5	0.4	74.9	0.6	208.6	1.6	408.3	3
Mixed Urban	77.7	0.6	81.5	0.6	82.1	6	0	0
Transportation/Roads	115	0.9	142.6	1.1	192.6	1.4	307.8	2.3
Railroads	4.1	0	4.1	0	4.1	0	4.1	0
Auxiliary Transportation	0.2	0	1.9	0	1.3	0	57	0.4
Playing fields/Recreation	16	0.1	14.3	0.1	42.9	0.3	225.4	1.7
Active Agriculture	748	5.6	543.1	4	286	2.1	360.9	2.7
Farmsteads	47	0.3	67.6	0.5	5.2	0	78.5	0.6
Forested	10134.9	75.4	9649.4	71.7	8849.3	65.8	5251.3	39
Water	878.6	6.5	884.2	6.6	933.5	6.9	979.6	7.3
Open Wetlands	416.6	3.1	397.9	3	324.8	2.4	2868.7**	21.3**
Idle/Open area	281.9	2.1	477.7	3.6	623.1	4.6	642	4.8

** aerial photos were used to map water in figuring totals.....**

Total Acres: 13450.2

100%

This chart shows the upward trend in Residential use and the downward trend in forest and active agriculture. Over the years, FOKOS group has gained on providing and protecting open space areas. The need to protect and gain open space will continue to exist. Our town should have a goal of approximately 20-30% of open space area. As of today we have approximately:___%.

*Resource Named: Rockingham County Commission

Recommendations:

1. The town should work to protect approximately 25% to 30% of its lands as open space.
2. The Town should continue to fund the Land Acquisition Capital Reserve Fund on an annual basis to have funds in place for purchase of open space or conservation easements when they become available in targeted areas.
3. Funding from both federal and state programs should be fully utilized where appropriate and accessible. Funds from private sources should be used when available.
4. The town should continue to partner with public and governmental entities on the purchase or preservation of open space or conservation easements.
5. The Planning Board should review town land use ordinances to incorporate appropriate use of conservation development strategies including use of incentive bonuses and conservation easements.
6. Wherever practical and appropriate, the Town of Kingston should collaborate with bordering communities to enhance opportunities for open space preservation.