DIVISION OF CONSERVATION SERVICES GRANTS AND OSRPS

What is an Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)?

- A document that describes a community's open space and recreation resources
- It is also a blueprint for action for open space and recreation decision-makers in a community
  - Conservation Commission
  - Parks Commission
  - CPC Committee
  - Planning Board
  - Local citizens

What is open space?

- Conservation land, forest land, agricultural land, parks, green buffers along roadways, etc.
- Also refers to undeveloped land with particular conservation or recreation interest, including vacant lots and brownfields that can be redeveloped into recreation areas, even community gardens
- Most of this land is owned by an agency or organization dedicated to conservation or recreation, but not all open space is protected

Why write an OSRP?

- Integrates many sources of data into one comprehensive picture of a community's natural resources
- Educates residents about conservation and recreation issues and increases awareness of local resources
- Identifies actions that will protect and manage community's resources

Why write an OSRP?

- And, it makes communities eligible to apply for grants through the Division of Conservation Services

What are the OSRP requirements?

- The Open Space and Recreation Planner's Workbook details the requirements (https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/08/tx/osrp-workbook08.pdf)
- Nine sections in the plan, highlights of which are the inventory of open space and the action plan

What is the process of writing an OSRP?

- First step is starting an Open Space and Recreation Committee
- Members can come from local boards, interested citizens, and municipal employees
- The lead author of the plan can be a volunteer, a municipal employee, graduate student, or a consultant (in some cases)
- Many plans are written on a shoe string budget with all volunteers

What is the process of writing an OSRP?

- Many times the OSRP sections are divvied up and a responsible party (or group of people) will be identified for each
- Everyone should help with the public participation process, which is the most important part of the planning process

What's an OSRP Update?

- OSRP Updates must contain all nine required sections of a plan
- What must be, could be, and doesn't have to be updated from one plan to the next is listed in the Workbook
- Municipality still must submit a complete plan

What are other important components of an OSRP to be aware of?

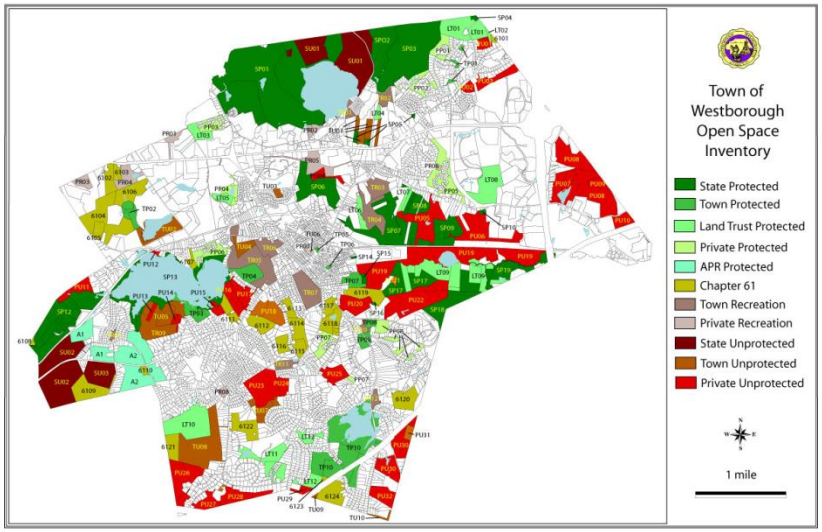
- Public participation process
  - Can take on many forms – survey, public meeting, workshop, etc.
  - Can combine different types – you know your community best
  - Helps to gather information on what land community members feel is important to protect, what recreational activities they'd like to see, etc.
  - Also helps to inform the community about the importance of open space and recreation in their community

What are other important components of an OSRP to be aware of?

- Environmental Justice
  - Aggressively combat against environmental burdens unduly placed onto low income communities and communities of color
  - Neighborhood where:
    - 25% of the households of annual median household income that is equal to or less than 65% of the statewide median, or
    - 25% of its population is minority, or
    - 25% of its population identifies as a household that has English isolation
  - Enhanced outreach must be completed in these locations

What are other important components of an OSRP to be aware of?

- Maps
  - Regional Context
  - Environmental Justice (if applicable)
  - Zoning
  - Soils and Geologic Features
  - Unique Features
  - Water Resources
  - Open Space Inventory
  - Action Plan



What are other important components of an OSRP to be aware of?

- Open Space Inventory
  - Lists all municipally-owned conservation and recreation properties only
  - Includes information on management agency, zoning, public access, condition, recreation potential, etc.
- Action Plan
  - Is now a Seven-Year Action Plan (instead of five)
  - Lists actions that will implement the plan's goals and objectives with a responsible party and potential funding source identified, all listed in priority order

What are other important components of an OSRP to be aware of?

- Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Report
  - Administrative requirements
  - Inventory of municipally-owned conservation and recreation properties only
  - Employment practices

What is the OSRP approval process?

- Once the community has written the plan, a hard copy is submitted to the Division of Conservation Services for review and approval
- A letter is sent to the community with any additions and/or changes that are required – the plan expires seven years (for seven year action plans) from the date of this letter
- If you feel that a specific comment is not relevant to your community, please call me
- Once those issues are addressed in a final plan, the community will receive a final approval letter

Who can I call for help?

- Helpful resources are listed in the Open Space and Recreation Planner's Workbook (on our website)
- State agencies, as well as local and statewide non-profits
- Me!

What grant programs are available?

- PARC – municipal grant program to acquire land for recreation purposes, build a new park, or renovate an existing park
- LAND – municipal grant program to acquire land for conservation purposes
- Small Communities – financial assistance for communities with less than 6,000 residents to write an OSRP or to complete an appraisal

What is the PARC grant program?

- Eligible projects:
  - Purchase parkland
  - Develop new public outdoor recreation facilities
  - Renovate existing municipal public parks

Veterans Field, Buckland

Photo courtesy www.recorder.com

What are the PARC program requirements?

- Applicant must have an approved Open Space and Recreation Plan
- Any city regardless of size or town with a population of 35,000 or more is eligible for maximum grant award amount
- Towns smaller than 35,000 may apply under the "small town," "regional," or "statewide" category
- Must have an authorized park/recreation commission and conservation commission
- Land must be dedicated to public park purposes and under custody of Park or Recreation Commission or Park Department

What are more PARC details?

- Public should participate in project selection and design
- State assistance ranges from 52 to 70% of total project cost
- Project must have municipal vote the authorizes application, raises/ borrows/appropriates *total* project cost (not just local share), and dedicates land to recreation purposes
- Maximum grant award is $400,000

What are the Secretary's priorities?

- Parks that go above and beyond to provide access for people with disabilities
- New parks that increase community's park equity
- Parks that are designed with climate resiliency in mind
- Projects that have planned for future stewardship

Tennis Courts, Shelburne
Photo courtesy Emily Crehan

What is the LAND grant program?

- Eligible Projects:
  - Purchase land for conservation and passive recreation in fee simple or a Conservation Restriction (CR)

Wendemuth Meadow, North Brookfield
Photo courtesy Cynthia Henshaw

What are the LAND grant requirements?

- Conservation or Agriculture Commission control, NOT general town land
- Permanently protected
- Public access - passive recreational use only
- Baseline & Management Plan
- CPA properties must convey required Conservation Restrictions

Mt. Jefferson Conservation Area, Hubbardston

What are more LAND details?

- Municipal conservation/agriculture commissions are the eligible applicant entities, but many municipalities partner with local land trusts or regional planning authorities
- Maximum grant award is $400,000
- The reimbursement rate is 52 to 70% of total project cost
- An appraisal and OSRP are required to apply
- Mass Historic Commission and Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program must submit comment letters

What is the grant selection process?

Hoyt-Sullivan Park, Somerville
Photo courtesy KMD Design

- Site visits by DCS staff
- Ranked by DCS staff according to rating system
- Funding awards made in rank order

What are the post-completion requirements?

Hazelwood Park, New Bedford
Photo courtesy Mary Rapoza

- State Law Article 97
- LWCF projects also have Section 6(f) protection
- Cannot convert to a non-conservation or non-recreational use without observing state and/or federal conversion requirements
- Must replace with another property! Can't return funding.

What are the Secretary's priorities?

- Larger parcels of land that can spark a larger-scale protection effort
- Core habitat and resilient landscapes
- Sites that provide recreational opportunities, including hunting
- Projects that have planned for future stewardship

Frohloff Farm, Ware

What is the Small Communities grant program?

- Eligible projects:
  - Appraisals – maximum reimbursement $3,000
  - Open Space and Recreation Plans – maximum reimbursement $10,000
  - Other planning to facilitate conservation projects – maximum reimbursement $5,000
  - A combination of these
- Grant program is for communities with 6,000 or less residents
- Applicants must apply for a FY21 LAND, PARC, DWSP, or Landscape Partnership grant
- Rolling applications with a May 8, 2020 deadline

What other grant programs are available?

- Drinking Water Supply Protection Grant Program – municipal grant program to protect drinking water supplies
- Landscape Partnership – grant program to acquire 500+ acres of land with two of three of the following entities: federal, state, or local government, land trust
- Conservation Partnership – grant program for 501(c)(3)s for the acquisition of land
- Land and Water Conservation Fund – grant program for any of the purposes listed above

What's Melissa's contact information?

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Grant program information, including grant applications and deadlines, can be found here too