

Northfield Open Space Committee

2006 Annual Report

The Open Space Committee (OSC) was newly-created in 2006 to implement the Northfield Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) approved by the town in November 2005. The committee met monthly during 2006, with an additional special meeting in September. The OSRP specifies a number of action items for the OSC over the five-year period from 2005 to 2010. During 2006 the OSC made substantial progress on approximately 15%-20% of these actions items, including these major emphases:

- Identification of an initial set of criteria by which the OSC will evaluate and prioritize property candidates for various forms of open space protection;
- Application of these criteria to the approximately 2000 acres of undeveloped land currently owned by the Northfield Mount Hermon school (NMH);
- An in-depth study of the state's Community Preservation Act (CPA), at the request of the Select Board, as to how the CPA could be applied in Northfield and what its costs to residents might be.

The OSC has nine members, seven appointed by the Select Board, a representative from the Conservation Commission, and a representative from the Planning Board; the initial membership comprised Joan Deely (Conservation Commission representative), Nick Fleck, Ruth Gallagher, Joanne McGee, Sam Richardson, Tom Shearer, Linda Smiaroski, Jennifer Tufts, and Jerry Wagener (Planning Board representative). During the year two members resigned for various personal reasons, Tom Shearer (replaced by Susan Ross) and Nick Fleck (replaced by Eleanor Goodman).

The OSC has a web page on Northfield's website. All of the committee's minutes are on the web page, as are the agenda for the next meeting, the complete OSRP (see chapter 9 for the specified action items), and a number of open-space-related links.

The following paragraphs summarize the work of the OSC during the year.

After its creation at the November 2005 Town Meeting, the OSC had its first meeting in March 2006; Nick Fleck was elected chair, Jerry Wagener vice chair, and Joanne McGee secretary. This was mostly an organizing meeting, but among the issues discussed were the ongoing Brush Mountain project and the need for the committee to learn more about the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) process.

In April the OSC began reviewing, at the request of the Select Board, the CPA. In addition the OSC was presented with its first request for an APR evaluation, the Richard Parsons APR, and began discussing criteria for identifying priorities for selecting open space projects. The OSC page on the town's website was established (<http://www.northfield.ma.us/index.php?id=155>).

In May the OSC acted on the impending sale of the Wickey APR house and lot sale at 79 Caldwell road, eventually recommending that the town not exercise its 'right of first refusal' to purchase this property. In other action the committee adopted seven categories of criteria for evaluating open space candidates.

The June meeting was devoted to an in-depth discussion of the APR program, led by William Ames, chair of the Agricultural Commission. At this meeting Nick resigned as chair of the committee, citing of lack of time. Jerry was elected chair pro tem for three months, then in September was elected chair.

The July meeting was devoted to a discussion of the proposed Mill Brook Conservation Area, led by a presentation from the Recreation and Conservation subcommittee of the NMH Transition Committee. At the end of the discussion the OSC voted to support this proposal and recommended that appropriate negotiations with NMH continue.

In August the OSC approved an initial set of categories/criteria to be used in evaluating open space candidates; this list is attached to the August minutes, available on the OSC website. At this meeting a Select Board request for a prioritized 'wishlist' of NMH properties by September 5 was discussed and the committee decided to (a) request an extension to the September 5 date and (b) schedule a special meeting on September 10 to develop the wishlist.

In September the NMH wishlist was completed and sent to the Select Board; the report packet is attached to the September minutes on the website. The OSC also formed a subcommittee (Sam Richardson, Joanne McGee, Linda Smiaroski) to spearhead the OSC investigation of the CPA.

The October and November meetings were devoted to reviewing and organizing the CPA information developed by the subcommittee, discussing the subcommittee's report of its findings and recommendations, and preparing for the November 28 joint meeting with the Select Board on the CPA. Jay Rasku of the North Quabbin Landscape Partnership was extremely helpful in assisting the committee in the preparation of the CPA material. The resulting principal recommendations are (a) that Northfield adopt the CPA and (b) that an expanded CPA committee be formed to educate the town regarding the CPA and to establish the CPA surcharge rate and whether or not to include exemptions.

In the December meeting the committee reviewed the results of the joint meeting with the Select Board, made plans to get answers to several unanswered questions regarding the CPA recommendations, and approved the CPA subcommittee's final 40-page report. As the final action of the year, the OSC began looking at making assignments for the 2007 work on the remaining items in the OSRP.

Respectfully submitted,

Jerry Wagener, OSC Chair