

Northfield Open Space Committee

2014 Annual Report

The Open Space Committee (OSC) focussed in 2014 on implementing high-priority objectives in the 2013 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) and related high-priority items in the 2014 Master Plan.

One of the major objectives of the OSRP, and of the Master Plan, is a community park. The OSC worked closely with the Recreation Commission (RC) during 2014 to implement objective R2 (community park) of the OSRP. The OSC and the RC jointly proposed to the Selectboard that an ad hoc committee be formed to identify the facilities and capabilities of the park, and to investigate potential locations. This committee has been approved - the Northfield Community Park Committee (NCPC) - and has begun functioning; it has two representatives from the OSC, two representatives from the RC, and several members at large from the community. So far one property is of interest: the NMH property adjoining the river and between the boat ramp and Schell Bridge. It however has a landfill on it that would be problematic for the town. The NCPC is developing "characteristics" for the park property that can be used in a Request for Proposals to solicit other candidate properties that might be appropriate for the park.

During 2014 the Trust for Public Land (TPL) obtained an option on 1650 acres of NMH land in the extreme northeast corner of Northfield. This includes Grandin Reservoir, the East Northfield Water Company facility, and the corresponding water supply watershed. The agreement is that TPL will pay \$2,300,000 for the land and relieve NMH of ownership of the water company. TPL applied for a Landscape Partnership grant for roughly two-thirds of the cost of the land; DCR is interested in providing the other third and adding the land to the Northfield State Forest. The grant was approved, but not at the requested amount, leaving a significant gap in identified funds. TPL is working on various funding options, and concurrently is trying to find a new owner for the water company. The OSC has been tracking the progress of this project, and in August met with three DCR representatives to discuss various aspects of DCR and the town working together on the management of this property.

Bill and Nancy Ames applied for a Conservation Restriction (CR) on 145 acres east of route 63 and north of South Mountain Road. The total cost of the CR is \$220,000. A LAND grant was awarded for \$135,000, and at the November Special Town Meeting the town approved, on a motion by an OSC member, the use of \$55,000 in CPA funds, leaving \$30,000 yet to raise by June. A wheel-chair-accessible trail is planned between route 63 and a major beaver dam/pond on the property.

Another major objective of the OSRP (and master plan) is to mark the town's hiking trails better, improve parking and trail information at trailheads, and to provide documentation for the trails. To this end the OSC (1) obtained trail markers based on the town flag, (2) constructed a website (on the OSC page on the town website, www.northfield.ma.us, with links at northfieldmass.org/trails) describing the trails, (3) installed three trailhead kiosks, and (4) prepared a brochure describing the trails. Copies of the brochure are available at the town hall and the library. The three kiosks installed in 2014 are at the Hobo Falls parking area, at the end of the golf course parking area (for the Mill Brook trail), and at the top of Alexander Hill Road; three more are planned for 2015.

Other notable OSC activities during 2014:

- wrote several letters to the Selectboard during the year regarding the impact of the proposed gas pipeline on conservation land and trails,
- monitored the National Park Service efforts to reopen the New England Trail over Crag Mountain,
- monitored progress on the FirstLight relicensing, including additional public access to the river,
- selected Bill Llewelyn for the 2013 Citizen Stewardship Award,
- continued to co-sponsor the third-Sunday-of-the-month hikes in Northfield.

Respectfully submitted by the 2014 members of the Open Space Committee:

Michael Barry, Julia Blythe, Robert Hall, Joanne McGee, Susan Ross, Kate Rossiter, Jennifer Tufts, Jerrold Wagener