

# Williamstown's Open Space & Recreation Plan

2016 Revision



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## 1) Plan Summary

The 2016 update to the Williamstown Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) was the result of a multi year process in which broad based public participation through many means was utilized to, along with analysis of ecological and natural resources needs of the community, to develop a set of broad based goals and vision surrounding the protection of our community's open space and recreational assets. This plan builds on work completed by past citizens of Williamstown with previous OSRP processes having been conducted in 1995 and 2005. The plan update was commissioned by the Conservation Commission. The Commission was aided by the contributions of two groups of Environmental Studies students at Williams College, the Spruces Land Use Committee, the Economic Development Committee, and an OSRP Review Group that was created by the Commission to review the final product of this process and develop the plan's broad based community goals. These goals are set forth below, it is the hope of the Conservation Commission that this plan will serve as a guidebook for major decisions concerning open space and natural resource protection as well as recreational choices for the Williamstown community in the ensuing years.

Goal 1: Ensure resource protection for lands with priority environmental and visual value

- A. Identify priority areas for protection
- B. Ensure protection of priority lands, including by working with private landowners
- C. Ensure good stewardship of town-owned open space and parklands
- D. Ensure protection of drinking water supplies
- E. Diligently protect lands subject to Wetlands Protection Act and River Protection Act

Goal 2: Develop and maintain recreational bikeways and walking paths accessible to the community

- A. Protect and improve existing bikeways and foot pathways
- B. Develop new bikeways and foot pathways as opportunities arise
- C. Increase linkages between bikeways and foot pathways
- D. Enhance public information on bikeways and foot pathways
- E. Ensure ADA access as required or practical

Goal 3: Support agricultural land preservation

- A. Work with agricultural community on open space preservation options
- B. Support farming in the local economy

Goal 4: Develop and maintain access to waterways

- A. Maintain existing waterway access locations
- B. Identify proposed locations for increased waterway access

Goal 5: Ensure adequate stewardship resources and funding

- A. Develop and implement management plans as appropriate
- B. Develop partnerships and volunteer networks
- C. Research grants and other sources of funding
- D. Utilize CPA funding as available

## 2) Introduction

### A) Statement of Purpose

The Williamstown Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) was revised and adopted in 2016. It is designed to provide a blueprint for community organizations and government agencies to preserve the rural character and natural beauty of the Town. The Plan evaluates the available natural and recreational resources and then establishes clear and consistent goals for prioritizing improvements and acquisitions which will best reflect the community's interest in promoting, reserving and enhancing its open space and recreational facilities. In furtherance of these objectives, the Plan is designed to:

A) Review open lands owned by the state, Town, non-profit organizations, and residents with lands enrolled in Chapter 61, 61A and 61B of the Commonwealth's General Statutes and also examine lands conserved under the state's conservation restriction and agricultural preservation restriction programs, including lands managed by the Conservation Commission, the Select Board and the Planning Board;

B) Address actions required in order to preserve natural resources and open space and examine ways to update the community's recreation options in light of its residential survey results while at the same time identifying the limiting factors and management issues affecting these improvements;

C) Develop both short-term and long-term goals to organize the current and future open space and recreation needs of the Town; and

D) work in partnership with the objectives of the Williamstown Master Plan (2002) and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission's "Sustainable Plan for the Berkshires (2014)."

### B) Process

The 2016 Revision to the Open Space and Recreation Plan began with the Williamstown Conservation Commission in Fall of 2013 contracting with the Williams College Center for Environmental Studies on several projects designed to enhance the Commission's understanding of the open space and recreational assets of Williamstown. It was this ground work that would lay the foundation for the Commission to update and revise the most recent (2005) Open Space and

Recreation Plan for Williamstown. That work was followed by additional surveys and planning undertaken by the Spruces Land Use Committee in 2015 and 2016.

In 2013, two groups of Environmental Planning students from Williams College undertook a study of the recreational assets and future needs of the community. This planning work had several different points of focus. The points included a look at current assets and how better utilize them, engagement of townspeople on current and future recreational needs and finally, a look at how those needs might be met through use of the newly acquired former Spruces Mobile Home Park property. These groups collected data via a mailed prepaid return survey of a random sample of town residents as well as multiple focus groups designed to reach individuals likely to be left out of the survey process. Several public meetings were also held to seek comment and provide context to the ongoing research. This information has been incorporated into the recreation focused sections of the 2016 update.

The next phase of planning work was completed as a joint project between the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation and the Conservation Commission with an additional group of Williams Environmental Studies Students. These students conducted extensive research regarding the unique aspects of Williamstown's environment and through careful GIS analysis were able to discern what areas of the community were most at risk and could most benefit through increased attention to land preservation and conservation. This research and analysis has been incorporated into the recreation focused sections of the 2016 update.

In addition to this work a Spruces Land Use Committee (SLUC), appointed by the Selectmen, undertook surveys in 2015 on preferred uses of The Spruces, a former mobile home park that was flooded by Hurricane Irene in 2011. Pursuant to a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant, the residents have relocated, the structures have been removed and the land is now vacant. The SLUC is charged with developing plans for a park on the property. As of the fall of 2016, planning is underway on the tasks of wetlands delineation, mapping and the development of conceptual and schematic plans with corresponding budget estimates. The results and status of this work are reflected in this 2016 update.

In 2016, The Conservation Commission through partnership with Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation embarked on combining this research into a single updated Open Space and Recreation Plan designed to comply with the standards set forth by the Commonwealth Division of Conservation Services. The Commission also convened an Ad Hoc OSRP Review Group to conduct a thorough review of the final product before it was provided to multiple town boards and stakeholders for formal review and public comment. The Review Group, made of broad cross section of the community and who's membership is listed at the conclusion of this report, was also responsible for

working through a 30 day public comment period and incorporating those comments and concerns into the final planning document.

### 3) Community Setting

#### *A) Regional Context*

Williamstown, also known as “The Village Beautiful,” is comprised of 46.86 square miles of land. The community sits in the fertile valley of the Hoosic River and two of its major tributaries. The community is entirely surrounded by mountains. At an elevation of 740 feet the view shed from all points in town are dominated by forested mountains, fast moving streams, and open farmland, some of which is still actively used in dairy farming and hay production. The central small, business sector and Williams College campus mark the center of town.

The beauty and setting of Williamstown and Williams College have attracted not only tourists, but also retirees and second homeowners to the area. The rich farmland and employment opportunities at the College and local industry have drawn permanent residents since the eighteenth century. The population is a mix of native “townies”, newcomers who work at the college, museums, or in neighboring communities, and retirees, many of whom are alumni of Williams College.

Williamstown’s setting and natural environment is the community’s most precious resource. The Mount Greylock Reservation which crosses the boundary with neighboring North Adams, Adams, and New Ashford sits to the south east of town. The Taconic Mountains lie on the western edge of Williamstown and comprise the border with New York. The Green Mountains frame the town to the north. The Greylock State Reservation, Taconic Trail State Forest, New York State Park lands, the Green Mountain National Forest serve to protect many of these peaks for the benefit of all neighboring communities. Additionally the 2200 acre Hopkins Memorial Forest owned by Williams College serves the same function. It however does not have official legal conservation protection. Extensive trail systems connect Williamstown with the surrounding communities of North Adams, Adams, Clarksburg, New Ashford, Pownal (VT), and Petersburg (NY). This multi-town and multi-state trail system is maintained through a group effort of the Williams College Outing Club, Williams College Center for Environmental Studies, Appalachian Mountain Club, National Park Service, Green Mountain Club, Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, Town of Williamstown, Town of New Ashford, Hoosic River Watershed Association, The Trustees of Reservations, Taconic Hiking Club, and Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation.

The Hoosic River, running in a northwesterly direction through the northern section of town, has been only partially developed recreationally but still provides a natural in-town greenway. The Hoosic passes through Cheshire, Adams, and North Adams before entering Williamstown, and was

once rendered unusable for recreation due to the pollution and direct sewer discharge from municipal sources and upstream industries. Over the past three decades efforts have improved the waters of the Hoosic River watershed to Class B water status except at the low point, where the river exits Williamstown. Williamstown, North Adams, and Clarksburg have formed the Hoosic River Water Quality District (HWQD) with a treatment plant situated on the river in the northern part of Williamstown. River advocates throughout the region have formed the Hoosic River Watershed Association (HooRWA) for the purposes of river conservation and distribution of information on recreational use and access.

Williamstown and its northern Berkshire neighbors have been characterized by slow economic growth during the last several decades. There has been a steady loss of jobs in the farming and manufacturing industry and these sectors are no longer considered a significant source of jobs or economic development. However with the increased emphasis on locally produced foods, there is a new focus on pursuing economic development through agriculture. A revived Agricultural Commission is working closely with local farmers to ensure the future stability of agriculture in the region. The majority of townspeople are employed in professional services, mostly in the fields of education, healthcare, and the service industry that has grown up around tourism. Even the service industry, most notably healthcare, has seen a major loss of jobs with the partial closing of the North Adams Regional Hospital. It remains to be seen what the long term impact of this reduction in services will be. The result of all of these long term employment trends is a stratified community composed of mostly low and high-income ranges, with few middle-income jobs. The challenge is to meet the needs for additional new economic development and diversification while preserving the scenic resources of the town in order to ensure continued tourism success.

### *B) Community History*

There is little evidence to suggest Native Americans had permanent settlement in the Williamstown area before the European settlers arrived, although Mohawk Indians traveled along the Mohawk Trail and had temporary camps in the area. The first permanent European settlers were soldiers stationed at Fort Massachusetts and Fort West Hoosac who arrived between 1745 and 1748 during the French and Indian War. Amongst these settlers was Colonel Ephraim Williams Jr., who bought two lots of Williamstown land. The plantation, originally called “West Hoosuck” was incorporated as a town in 1765. This same year Colonel Williams, who had been killed during the Battle of Lake George, bestowed his estate to the town to form a free school. In return the town was renamed Williamstown. In 1793 the Free School was chartered as Williams College, the second

institution of higher learning to be founded in the Commonwealth. The College since its founding has been situated on Main Street in the center of town.

Williamstown was initially dominated by farming, primarily for dairy and wool production. The town also included some small local mills and general stores. The railroad, especially after the opening of the Hoosac Tunnel, brought an influx of people and industrial practices into an agrarian society. Almost immediately, Williamstown was transformed by the appearance of mills producing textiles (Walley and Station Mills) and twine (Water Street Mill).

The railroad also allowed the development of a significant tourist economy in the town. Major resort hotels were constructed in Williamstown and the South Williamstown Five Corners. The Idlewild and Greylock Hotels remained vibrant parts of the community until the early 20th Century. Wealthy industrialists also came to Williamstown for the scenic nature of the valley. In the 1930s and 1940s, E. Parmalee Prentice and his wife Alta, the daughter of John D. Rockefeller, also developed Mount Hope Farm, a respected experimental farm.

Following World War II, Williamstown grew rapidly, significantly changing the business landscape of the town. Major employers have included Steinerfilm, Ivy Guild, Sweet Brook Nursing Home, Williamstown Medical Associates, the Mount Greylock Regional School District, and Williams College. Suburban residential development also expanded significantly in this time period. Major subdivisions were constructed in the northern parts of town and the Stratton Hill and Luce Road areas saw extensive residential development. In 2016, Williamstown continues to be known for the presence of Williams College, its cultural attractions, and its scenic rural landscape.

### C) Population Characteristics

Williamstown's demographic and economic characteristics are important elements in assessing the needs of the community. The most recent census data shows a decreasing population, with decreasing percentages of people both in the under 18 and over 65 brackets (Table 1). The median age and median income have increased since the 2000 census (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of population characteristics in 2000 and 2010 (Massachusetts 2000 Summary and 2010 Demographic Data).

	2000	2010
Population	8,424	7,754
Median Age	35.6	37.4
Population: Under 18	15.3%	13.4%
Population: Over 65	19.6%	12.2%
Median income	\$67,500	\$72,743

In 2010, at the time of the last census, Williamstown had a population of 7,754 with 2,542 households. The population has decreased since the previous census in 2000, which recorded 8,424 residents. This trend is likely the result of declines in employment opportunities throughout the region, particularly in manufacturing. In addition to town residents the Census Bureau numbers include approximately 2,000 undergraduate students enrolled at Williams College. Further detailed demographic information is available in the 2015 report of the Economic Development Committee for Williamstown.

In 2010, the median age of Williamstown residents was 43.9 (Census Bureau). Residents under the age of 18 made up 13.4% of the population, and 20.6% were over the age of 65. However, the greatest proportion of residents was between the ages of 20 and 24 (18.2%), likely the Williams College student body, followed by ages 15 to 19 at 13.7%. Family households constituted 60.9% of all households, and 22% of households had children under the age of 18.

The median household income in Williamstown is \$72,743, with a per capita income of \$39,451 (Census Bureau). Approximately 21.7% of households earn less than \$25,000 annually, and 9.7% make more than \$200,000 (Census Bureau). An estimated 77.9% of workers drove to work, and 11.2% of workers walked to work, with a mean commute time of 16.1 minutes (Census Bureau). In all, 92.3% of households had at least one vehicle available (Census Bureau). Williamstown also had an 8.8% unemployment rate at the time of the 2010 census (Census Bureau).

The student population represents an important source of volunteers for programs serving children, the elderly, and recreation sites. The Williams Outing Club has responsibility for maintaining a large portion of Williamstown's hiking trails. Many of the college-owned facilities are often available for use by the public. These include the Simon Squash Courts, Towne Field House, Cole and Weston Fields, Lansing Chapman Rink, the 8-lane 400-meter track, an indoor swimming pool, a fitness center with weight room, and walking paths.

The number of residents in Williamstown grew rapidly after World War II, but declined 13.4% around 1970. The principal reason for the regional population decline is the steady loss of job opportunities in manufacturing and industry, with the under 18 years of age bracket most affected. Employment opportunities have diminished less in Williamstown than the county as a whole. The labor force has stabilized after a loss of more than 800 jobs between 1983 and 1991.

The majority of total jobs are in service industries, the largest being educational and health services. The tourism sector, including creative economy institutions, also accounts for a significant portion of Williamstown's job mix. The Town's economy is diverse and includes a small agricultural and forestry presence, small business sector, art museums, large summer theater festival, tourist businesses such as lodging, restaurants, and shops, and health care industry. The major employer is Williams College, which offers a range of job opportunities in food services, maintenance, office staff, administrative personnel, and highly specialized faculty.

### D) Patterns of Development

Town lands underwent nine original divisions. These are detailed on the Coffin 1843 Subdivision Map and are detailed as follows;

- 1751: 11-acre house lot on Main Street
- 1754: 10-acre meadow lot near the Hoosic or Green River
- 1st 50-acre lots, 2nd 50-acre lots
- 1763: 60-acre white-oak lot, 60-acre white pine lot, 60-acre lot, 30-acre "pitch" lot

### 19th Century

Williamstown reached its agricultural peak around 1830, when 77% of all Williamstown lands were cleared of forest. The farming industry gradually declined during the second half of the nineteenth century. Waterpower in Williamstown was too limited for any major development during this time period and the community never experienced a complete industrialization. Three factories

in Williamstown were created, but small industry and business supplied most of the local needs. Overall, in the nineteenth century, Williamstown was a compact, central village, surrounded by farms and forests.

### 20th Century & Present

Following World War Two, Williamstown changed remarkably as farms and forests have given way to residential development. Williams College created two major subdivisions of farmland and forest to create faculty housing. House lots now line back roads that once served farms in the southern, eastern, and northwest sections of the town, and Mount Hope Farm, offering some of the most scenic vistas, has been subdivided by a group of Williams College alumni. More recent major construction projects for Williams College include building a new stadium complex, new library, with work underway on an expanded Science Center. A new Elementary School was built in 1999 and the town is currently undertaking a major renovation, including some new construction, of a new regional high school. These renovations and reconstruction projects have been in previously developed areas. It is in the residential sector that the most recent and significant development of open lands has occurred.

During the decade from 1995 to 2005, 95 new residences were built. The residential sector places the most development pressure on Williamstown's open spaces. These changes have far-reaching impacts on land use patterns and attitudes of citizens. Conversion of agricultural lands to forests and residential use has altered some of Williamstown's traditional view sheds and threatens the rural appearance of the town, although the natural beauty of Williamstown is recognized as its greatest natural resource. Changing ownership of certain parcels has resulted in the rerouting or abandonment of some recreation trails. Loss of neighborhood centers has almost eliminated playgrounds and outdoor gathering places. School grounds have become the only athletic fields open for general use. Trees have grown up along some of the roads into Williamstown, blocking the panoramic views from several scenic overlooks.

This pattern has begun to change following the 2008 financial crisis. In the five years following the financial crisis only 29 single family homes have been built and no single family subdivisions have been built. This is a decrease in new detached home construction of approximately 60%. Many of these projects have also occurred where a previously built home was torn down, decreasing pressure on surrounding open lands. Other projects in Williamstown are in the works to further this trend by increasing availability of multifamily housing within the town core. In 2010 the Planning Board relaxed

restrictions on placing apartments in portions of the Village Business District. 61 units of housing have been completed at the Cable Mill on Water Street as of mid 2016, and affordable housing has been completed on Church Street and is currently proposed for Cole Avenue. At the same time the Planning Board is working on additional efforts to encourage infill development and alternative housing types to further decrease pressure on surrounding open lands.

#### 4) Environmental Inventory and Analysis

##### A) Geology, Soils, and Topography

Williamstown is set in the northwest corner of the Berkshire uplands. At the center of town, the valleys of the Hoosic River and the Green River (a Hoosic tributary) join to form a third valley through which the Hoosic flows northwest to the Hudson River. These three valleys are surrounded by hills and mountains with elevations to 3174 feet. The center of town lies in the 600-700 foot elevation range. The lowest point is at 594 feet where the Hoosic River exits into Vermont. The configuration of these hills and valleys was created 500 million years ago by the Taconic orogeny, a mountain formation event that occurred when continental plates collided and the land mass that became Europe pushed offshore islands to the west, across what became New England. Thus local mountains contain layers of rock formed under the ocean; their contents include quartzite, schists, and limestone (marble).

The different rates of weathering and erosion of these ancient rocks have shaped the ridges and valleys of today's Williamstown. Several local hills and ridges, including Pine Cobble and Stone Hill, are capped and protected from erosion by quartzite, a rock harder than steel and very resistant to weathering by either chemical or physical agents. The Taconic and Greylock Ranges, built from metamorphosed shales (slate, phyllite and schist) also resist chemical weathering to a large degree. By contrast, the lower parts of the Hoosic and Green River Valleys are underlain by the metamorphosed limestone (marble), which is only slightly harder than a fingernail. Over millions of years, streams have cut their valleys through the softer rocks, especially in areas where the more resistant rocks have buckled down far beneath the surface in the troughs of folds. Thus the hills and valleys of Williamstown had been long established by the time the glaciers moved south from Canada. As dramatic as the successive ice ages were, they did not create the topography; they only modified it. The most recent ice age, which peaked about 18,000 years ago, covered Mount Greylock and filled in the valleys. As the ice moved slowly to the southeast, it scraped across bedrock ridges and left them smoother on the up-ice side and steeper in the down-ice direction. The glacier also widened the existing stream valleys, leaving them with the broad U-shaped profile which is apparent today. As this last ice sheet retreated, its meltwater was blocked by ice dams to the north, resulting in the formation of a 450-foot deep lake named Lake Bascom. Shorelines and beaches of this lake can still be seen along the margins of the Williamstown Valley at present elevations of 1050 feet. Streams draining into the lake deposited their sediment loads, building deltas into the lake. Coarser sediment was deposited close to the shoreline, while finer grained silt and clay were carried farther out to

settle in the deepest parts of the lake. As the lake fell, successively lower shorelines and deltas were constructed at the 900, 750, and 650 foot elevations.

Land use and water supply in Williamstown have been determined by the contours of the hills and valleys and by the distribution of sediment deposits along the various shoreline levels of glacial Lake Bascom. The topography of Williamstown is one of the steepest in the Commonwealth. The overall vertical slope drops from 3174 feet near the summit of Mt. Greylock (the actual summit at 3491 feet is in Adams) to 594 feet in the Hoosic River Valley. These slopes are largely undevelopable because of their steepness and lack of stable soils. Residential and commercial development and transportation networks have historically been sandwiched into the valleys, which are relatively narrow.

Williamstown's soils tend to be rocky as a result of glacial outwash or poorly drained due to high concentrations of silts and clays. The 1984 report *2003: A Study of Williamstown over the Next 20 Years* found 61% of the soils in Williamstown unsuitable for development. At the higher elevations soils are poor, thin, and easily eroded. Other locations are wet or very heavy clay. These conditions present major problems for sewage disposal. A sewer system serves the central village and has been extended to serve certain outlying areas, such as Route 7 South to the high school. Other properties must be fitted with oversize leach fields or artificial dry wells for septic treatment. The limitations of the underlying soils have combined with the steep topography to contain the spread of development in Williamstown.

Approximately 11% of Williamstown's soils are rated prime agricultural soils. These lie in the river valleys and at the lower elevations along the former shorelines of the glacial lake. In the last century, at the height of the farming economy, 70% of the land was in agricultural use, though the cleared lands at the higher elevations were used mainly as pasture for sheep or cattle. As late as 1952, 18% of the land was farmed. Today, less than 10% of Williamstown's land is farmed. This figure has remained stable for the past decade or so despite a continuing decrease in dairy farming; either the remaining dairy farms have expanded herd size and use of other farmer's land, or farmers have taken on new agricultural endeavors. There remain only two traditional dairy farms in Williamstown. A third dairy has found success milking cows for cheese and raw milk production and has developed into a local model of alternative locally focused 21st Century agriculture. Thus, though ownership and specific uses have fluctuated, the actual amount of farmland has remained relatively constant. The amount of land enrolled in Chapter 61A, however, has increased significantly. It should be noted that

to keep the Williamstown farm economy strong, there needs to be a critical mass of working farms to support the local associated agricultural businesses. Although much of Williamstown's high-quality farmland has been preserved through the Commonwealth's Agricultural Preservation Restriction program, preservation of the remaining farmland will give greater security to the town's remaining farm businesses. Much of the prime agricultural land in Williamstown has been developed. These developments include the White Oaks area in North Williamstown and the Haley Development in the village center, for example. Interestingly, the majority of Williamstown's farms are not located on soils classified as prime agricultural soils. (The soils of Williamstown are shown on Required Map 2: Soils and Geologic Features.)

### B) Landscape Character

Williamstown's landscape is known as "The Purple Valley," probably due to the distinctive purple cast to the surrounding mountains, especially at sunset. Noticeable at all seasons, this subtle color draws the attention of visitors and residents. The central village in the valleys offers tree-lined streets, attractive buildings, and considerable amounts of open space. The surrounding hills present a pastoral aspect of wooded hills and open farmland. The Williams College mascot, the Purple Cow, thus personifies two of the town's prominent characteristics.

Within the past fifty years, many of the open fields have grown back to forest, a trend begun 150 years ago. Some of those that remained open are now dotted with residences, many of them second homes. Openings in wooded areas marking new residences have also appeared. As previously mentioned recent development has occurred on Pine Cobble, Bee Hill Road, Northwest Hill Road, Stratton Road, Henderson Road, and Chestnut Street. Though many of these areas were cleared for agriculture 200 years ago, the clearings for roads and house lots present a far different appearance. The change is particularly apparent at night when lights twinkle from what was once forest and pasture. Housing, especially moderately priced or affordable housing, has become a serious issue in Williamstown. In recent years the town has begun to address these issues through serious use of infill multifamily development. As evidenced by the Town's Master Plan, the policy for many years has been to place new development in areas that have previously been developed and to protect remaining open space. Zoning however has generally not reflected this policy. So the challenge remains to find a sustainable balance between development and conservation and preservation of neighborhood character. Zoning limits development on the fragile upper slopes; subdivision regulations encourage clustering and reward the setting-aside of conservation lands in developments. Further zoning changes are likely to be proposed to further promote appropriate infill

developments. Notable features of the Williamstown landscape are shown on Required Map 3: Unique Features.

### C. Water Resources

#### 1. Surface Water

Williamstown is located within the Hoosic River watershed. The Hoosic River and its tributaries are Williamstown's major surface water resource. Waters of the Hoosic enter the town from North Adams on its eastern border, run through the northern section of the village for 4.6 miles, and exit to the northwest into Vermont; they eventually cross into New York and join the Hudson River. The Hoosic's major tributary is the Green River, whose main and secondary branches converge just north of Five Corners to flow north through the center of the village and join the Hoosic near the former railroad yards. Four smaller streams also flow directly into the Hoosic within the boundaries of Williamstown. Flows in the Hoosic and Green Rivers reach their mean peak in the spring months at 300 cubic feet/second (CFS) and their mean low in early fall at 40 CFS.

Once very polluted, the water quality in the Hoosic and its tributaries are rated Class B waters, suitable for the protection and propagation of fish and wildlife as well as primary and secondary recreation (swimming, boating, and fishing). The major factor in its clean-up was the Massachusetts Clean Waters Act of 1966, the Federal Clean Water Act of 1972, and the resulting construction of modern sewage treatment facilities. The loss of industries, some of which were heavy polluters, was also a factor.

Several recent projects in Williamstown have alleviated some of the rivers' burden. The decline of dairy farming has decreased non-point agricultural pollution in the rivers; this is particularly true of the Green River. The major reconstruction of Spring Street, which was completed in 2001, included improvements to the sewer and stormwater systems to prevent cross-contamination. Gale Road, which had experienced problems with septic systems now has a sewer system, decreasing pollution in Christmas Brook (a Green River tributary).

The Hoosic River Watershed Association has played the lead role in the promotion of the rivers as a recreational resource. The Association's long-term goals include increasing protection of the rivers and their riparian buffer zones, developing more public access and a feeling of ownership toward the rivers, and facilitating appropriate recreational use of the rivers. HooRWA sponsors many

events, including river cleanups, children's activities, and also works to promote fishing and canoeing and to develop trails near the river. Town-owned land along the Green River from the center of town to its confluence with the Hoosic has been developed as Linear Park. Additionally private lands along the Green River have recently been acquired by the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, thus creating a greenway of municipal and nonprofit owned land through the center of town. There is no convenient boat access in the center of town, but there is a canoe launch on the Hoosic off Ashton Avenue (just over the North Adams line) and another (Lauren's Launch) on the Moore Property to the north of the town center. Each launch could benefit from improvements. There are also swimming holes scattered along the rivers. A playground has been constructed near the southern limit of Linear Park. There is also a single tennis court in another section of the park that is well used by those residents who know of it. All trails are maintained by foot traffic and the efforts of neighbors. In 1997, WRLF and HoorWA received a grant through the Massachusetts Trails and Greenways program to create a nature trail with interpretive signs at the northern end of Linear Park. Unfortunately, the signs and the trail have been vandalized and degraded, making the area much less appealing. In 2003, as part of the Williamstown 250th celebration, a trail system with a kiosk, benches and interpretive information was developed in the northern section of Linear Park along the Green and Hoosic Rivers. Although these trails are on fairly level terrain, none has been made accessible to handicapped and elderly citizens. It is hoped that with the recent acquisition of the adjacent Lehovoc property along the west bank of the Green River, and the near future possibility of a bike path bridge across the Green River, new trails and improvements can be made in this area.

There are few sizable ponds in Williamstown. Only three are larger than two acres in area. Bridges Pond, seven acres in size, is owned by the Town and maintained by the Conservation Commission; Five-acre Eph's Pond is owned by Williams College; and Sherman Springs Reservoir, two acres, is part of the town's surface water supply. A small nature study pond was also built in 1993 at Mt. Greylock Regional High School by the school's business partner, Petricca Industries. In addition, there is a small pond at The Trustees of Reservations' Field Farm. Naturalists and bird-watchers frequent Bridges and Eph's Ponds. Bridges Pond is littered and polluted with heavy metals. The storm sewer systems have been improved since the last time this plan was updated, decreasing the sedimentation of both ponds. Access to Bridges Pond is very poor and involves trespassing on railroad property; there are also problems with water flow control, beavers, and vandalism at this pond.

A portion of the flow of Hemlock Brook is diverted in the summer to create a seasonal swimming area at Margaret Lindley Park. The Conservation Commission, and the Department of

Cemeteries and Parks have worked together to improve this park; within the last decade the gabion wall, inlet structure, dam, well and bathhouse have been repaired or replaced. The bathhouse was also renovated and a well replaced. Improvements of the trail system are also ongoing. Problems with leakage and elevated coliform counts have been resolved. With the exception of Margaret Lindley Park, there is no handicapped access to Williamstown's surface waters.

### 2. Flood Hazard Areas

Flood plain districts exist along the Hoosic and Green Rivers and along the lower reaches of Broad, Hopper, Hemlock, and Birch Brooks. The 100-year flood plain covers an area of 384 acres. More than half of this land has already been developed; the largest of these developments was The Spruces Mobile Home Park. Tropical Storm Irene flooded the Spruces; this led to the closing of the park and the town taking ownership of the land. A committee is presently working to develop a plan for the reuse of the park. Former residents of the park have relocated. Williamstown does participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), flood insurance is available to affected households. Flood plain districts along the Hoosic and Green Rivers are easily accessible from the center of town. Trails in Linear Park and near Cole Field are used by the public for walking, jogging, mountain biking, and bird-watching. They are in varying states of repair and are not accessible to people with disabilities.

### 3. Wetlands

Williamstown's wetlands are small and scattered. For this reason they are hard to protect. They have been inventoried as part of a Williams College senior thesis (1986) and as a class project (1989). Both documents are available in the library of the Center for Environmental Studies at Williams College. Open water wetlands, mainly ponds, are the most common type. There are also shallow and deep marshes, wooded swamps, shrub swamps, wet meadows, seasonally flooded flats, floodplain forests, and vernal pools. There are no bogs in town, but a calcareous fen is located in the northern part of town on a town-owned parcel of land (the Dean property) and adjacent protected property, and other fens lie along the floodplain of the Hoosic River. These wetlands are home to special communities of flora and fauna adapted to these unique environments.

According to the inventories mentioned above, the total area of these wetlands is 595 acres. They range in size from a wood swamp of 69 acres to farm ponds at 0.1 acres. Most are small due to the town's location near the top of the Hoosic watershed. However, Williamstown's wetlands have not been studied comprehensively since the abovementioned projects, so any change in their status is unknown. The wetlands are under the control of a variety of owners, including the Commonwealth,

the Town, public groups, non-profit organizations, and private landowners. Some of the wetlands are used widely for birding, canoeing, hiking, hunting, fishing, and other outdoor activities. Recently completed at the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation's Sheep Hill Property is a fully handicap accessible wetlands boardwalk.

#### 4. Aquifer Recharge Areas

Williamstown draws its water from wells drilled into the Hoosic Valley Confined Aquifer. Located in sandy gravel deposits under the Hoosic and Green Rivers, it is confined by a thick layer of fine sand and glacial lake silts deposited at the bottom of Lake Bascom. The recharge areas for this aquifer are in the surrounding uplands to the northeast and northwest. These areas have been protected by the creation of a Water Resource Overlay Zoning District adopted at the May 1992 Town Meeting. Two surface reservoirs provide back-up water supply. The water resources of Williamstown are shown on Required Map 4: Water Resources, found at the end of this section.

#### D. Vegetation

The mountains and valleys of Williamstown, with their varying altitudes and exposures, are home to diverse plant communities and thirty-six state-listed rare plant species (nine species of special concern, eleven threatened species, and sixteen endangered species). In addition to its ecological significance, this range of vegetation adds an important dimension to outdoor recreation in Williamstown. Most hikes, even relatively short ones, pass through multiple plant communities. Because of this, hikers have the opportunity to experience a variety of flora and associated fauna. The region's combination of irregular terrain, scattered rocky outcroppings, many surface water resources, and varied vegetation provides an appealing outdoor experience for people of all backgrounds and interests. The Appalachian Mountain Club, The Trustees, the Hoosic River Watershed Association, the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation, and the Williams College Outing Club take advantage of this attractive natural setting and lead hikes and walks to some of the more interesting plant communities in the area. About two-thirds of Williamstown's land area is forested. These lands were once cleared for agriculture or logged for timber or charcoal. Some have grown back to forest, following natural successional patterns; others have been continually disturbed by logging. The most common forest type is mesic northern hardwood forest, which is found in extensive unbroken stands on the slopes of Mt. Greylock and the Taconics to the West of the village center. The stands on Mt. Greylock are protected by their location within the State Reservation. Those sections of the Taconic Forest within the Taconic State Park and the Hopkins Memorial Forest which does not have formal conservation protection, a total of approximately 3500 acres, are also

protected. The forests of Williamstown include some unique plant communities. One of the few stands of mesic northern conifer forest in the Commonwealth may be found on the summit of Mt. Greylock. Also in the Greylock Reservation, near Roaring Brook, is an old-growth stand of hemlock, one of four old-growth areas in Williamstown. The forests of the Hopper are home to many spring ephemeral wildflowers. By contrast, at the northern section of town, a floodplain forest stands beside the Hoosic River near the Williams College athletic fields, and the south-facing slopes of Pine Cobble harbor a southern community of plants rarely found in Berkshire County. The College-owned Hopkins Memorial Forest, covering 2250 acres, is used for scientific field research by Williams College faculty and students. Mainly a northern hardwood forest, it includes an area of old-growth beech and sugar maple forest known as the Beinecke Stand. A southern calcareous cliff community can also be found within the HMF borders.

The College opens the area to the public for passive recreation activities such as hiking, jogging, skiing, and horseback riding (in designated areas). Deer hunting is allowed by permit during the Massachusetts hunting season. Global climate change and invasive species have both influenced the trajectory of Williamstown's plant communities. While at the current time the most pressing threat to Williamstown's forests is the presence of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) in nearby Dalton and Pittsfield, it is likely that additional destructive invasive pests will establish themselves in Williamstown. The hemlock wooly adelgid, and the Asian longhorned beetle are not currently immediate threats to Williamstown but could be in the future.

### E. Fisheries and Wildlife

The large tracts of forested land, with their varied elevations and vegetative cover, support about fifty mammalian species. The woodland streams and wetlands support at least twenty-five reptile and amphibian species, two of which are listed as species of special concern, and more than twenty fish species, two of special concern. More than 120 bird species nest within the town limits. The number of deep-woods mammal species, including bobcat, black bear, fisher, moose, and the numbers of wild turkey, have increased dramatically over the past decade. This may be due to the relatively stable stands of mature forest found in Taconic Trail State Park, Mt. Greylock State Reservation, and Hopkins Memorial Forest. On the other hand, loss of habitat, forest fragmentation, and pesticide and herbicide use affect wildlife populations, and some local songbird populations appear to be in decline. The rivers provide important corridors for migratory animals. Aquatic life, birds, and mammals all make use of them, and their bordering wetlands, for seasonal migrations. Local non-migratory species make use of various kinds of continuous open space for local movement.

Development pressures threaten these corridors and lead to habitat fragmentation, greatly decreasing the ecological integrity of the landscape. Hunting and fishing are practiced in Williamstown and its environs, but does not represent a threat to local wildlife populations. The Hoosic River is the only river in the Commonwealth in which Brown Trout naturally reproduce and some of the trout caught have reached record size. Other species commonly caught in the river include Northern Pike and Chain Pickerel. The presence of PCBs downriver from former industrial sites in North Adams precludes human consumption of fish caught in the Hoosic. The main stem of the Green River, its West Branch, and three local brooks (Hemlock, Roaring, and Broad) are stocked for fishing; these waters comprise over two-thirds of Williamstown's trout-fishing areas. Species that can be caught in these waters include Rainbow Trout, Brown Trout, and native Brook Trout.

### F. Scenic Resources and Unique Environments

The scenery of Williamstown figures prominently in the preceding and following sections because of its intrinsic importance to the character of the town. This section highlights the diversity of the Williamstown landscape and defines the importance of particular sites. Areas described in this list are: 1) scenic landscapes, 2) major characteristic or unusual geologic features, 3) cultural, archaeological, and historic areas, and 4) unique environments.

#### 1. Scenic Landscapes

a. Mt. Greylock Reservation and Area Extending West to the Taconic Crest (includes Deer Ridge and Agricultural Area of South Williamstown):

This important section of landscape has been designated a "Distinctive Landscape" by the Department of Environmental Management, which cites the impressive vistas and the most picturesque mountain scenery in the Commonwealth. The Inventory states that this vicinity is entitled to the highest level of protection (called "Class A - Distinctive") as a scenic resource. 1982 *Massachusetts Landscape Inventory: A survey of the Commonwealth's Scenic Areas*. "The vistas are impressive and the mountain scenery is the most picturesque in the Commonwealth." *Inventory (1982)* at p. 217. No one in Williamstown would disagree with this characterization. Indeed, the cover picture of the Inventory is of the agricultural area of South Williamstown, the Hopper and Mt. Greylock. This large section of the town is distinctive because of its sharply defined mountains with steep scarps to the east and west enclosing a broad valley dotted with large farms. The open areas at the summits and in the valley provide breathtaking viewsheds, many of more than ten miles. "The Hopper," a steep three-sided valley in the shape of a grain hopper carved into the west slope of Mt. Greylock is described in Part 2, Major Geologic Features. Route 7 traverses the valley north to south,

opening excellent views of the mountains and the agricultural sections of the town along its entire route. Many people call the panorama seen from Route 7 at Mt. Greylock Regional High School the best view in Williamstown. To the east, one looks across open farms, over Deer Ridge, into the Hopper, and up to the summit of Mt. Greylock. To the south, rolling hills rise to South (now Brodie) Mountain. To the west, more farms lead up to the Taconic Range. Much of the land one sees from this point is protected; two town roads in this area are designated scenic roads (Scott Hill Road and Oblong Road).

### b. Foothills: Bee, Sheep, and Stone Hills

This area, which abuts the Mt. Greylock area to the north, is rated “Noteworthy” in the Department of Conservation and Recreation Inventory. It is marked by open fields, rolling, wooded hills, and high ridges. It is bisected by Route 7, which is the major entrance to the village center from the south and west. The road, which runs in a valley along Hemlock Brook, offers views of fields and wooded hills. It is protected from strip development by its zoning, which is residential along most of its length, but with sections designated for “tourist business.” Stone Hill, which rises to the east of Route 7, is a rocky quartzite outcrop just south of the town center. It is crossed by now-abandoned Stone Hill Road, once the main route out of town to the south. Stone Hill provides an area close to the center of town for recreation and offers excellent views of the surrounding hills and fields. Most of Stone Hill is privately owned. Public access is by the tolerance of individual landowners. Although the majority of this land is not officially protected, public sentiment runs high and proposed developments have been met with opposition strong enough to cause landowners to change their plans. The old Rosenburg Farm on Sheep Hill, just west of Stone Hill, was purchased in 2000 by the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation. Renovations to the farmhouse were completed in 2003 and the property is now the WRLF headquarters. The large meadow provides good wildlife habitat and is open to the public for birding, walking, sledding, nature study, and other passive recreation activities. Both Sheep Hill and Bee Hill provide nice views of the Purple Valley as well.

### c. Pine Cobble Mountain

A large, wooded mountainous area in the northeast corner of the town, Pine Cobble rises to an elevation of 1894 feet. Its summit offers fine views of the town center and surrounding mountains. From the village center, it looms as the northerly section of the ring of mountains around the town. Pine Cobble lookout, like Stone Hill, is close to the center of town and is a popular hiking

spot. The sandy shoreline of former Lake Bascom can be easily identified along the trail. A short spur trail leads to Bear Spring. Rising at the base of a tall, jagged cliff, Bear Spring is the only dependable source of water for wildlife on the south face of Pine Cobble.

### d. Stratton and Blair Roads

Located on the easterly side of town, the 360 degree panorama from the intersection of these roads is another of the best views in Williamstown. To the west are farm fields and the Taconic Range; to the south, Mt. Greylock and the Hopper; to the east is Pine Cobble; to the north, more farms, Stone, Bee, and Sheep Hills, the center of town, and the Green Mountains. Although much of the open land (mostly farmland) in this immediate area is under only temporary protection through Chapter 61A, more than 300 acres is permanently preserved through the Commonwealth's Agricultural Restriction Program.

### e. The Glens: Flora and Ford

Flora Glen is one of the outstanding woodland brooks in the town. It rises on the foothills of the Taconic Range on state-owned land. It descends in a beautiful ravine, Flora Glen, where William Cullen Bryant is said to have written "Thanatopsis" during his student days at Williams College. Flora Glen runs through state-owned, town-owned (Conservation Commission), and non-profit-owned lands, as well as a privately-owned parcel that is under Conservation Restriction to the WRLF. Flora Brook once fed the former town ice pond on Bee Hill Road, which is a town-designated Scenic Road. The pond disappeared when the town breached the dam due to concerns about its stability after a flash-flooding event. Ford Glen, a wild and beautiful ravine within the College-owned Hopkins Memorial Forest, is another outstanding brook in the town. It rises on the east slopes of the Taconics and descends through HMF and some privately-owned land to join the Hoosic River, where it flows about one and one-half miles to the Vermont border.

### f. Green and Hoosic Rivers

These rivers have been described in section 4C. They are included in this section because of their aesthetic importance in the landscape of the town. The main and secondary branch of the Green River rise to the south and join at the heart of the agricultural area in South Williamstown. The river then flows beside Route 43 to the center of town; this corridor is heavily used by vehicular traffic and by runners and bicyclists. Together, the Green and Hoosic Rivers define the in-town greenways. Their flowing waters add immeasurable charm and interest to the trails and open areas

that abut them. Lauren's Launch, a town maintained canoe put in is located on the Hoosic River along the access road to the Town's Public Works Facility.

### g. Ephs Pond

Eph's Pond is one of the most-visited natural areas in Williamstown, thanks to its central position adjacent to the Williams athletic fields and close to the campus and Town Center. The pond's swampy shoreline and the adjacent floodplain forest along the Hoosic River attract many bird species in all seasons, despite the intensive use of the Williams College playing fields for sports, family activities, and dog walking.

## 2. Major Characteristics or Unusual Geographic Features

### a. The Hopper

Deep cuts and steep valleys are characteristic of the mountainsides on all sides of the town. The Hopper is by far the greatest of them all. Part of the Mt. Greylock Reservation, its 1600 acres were designated in 1977 as a Natural Area by the then MA Department of Environmental Management and, in 1978, a National Natural Landmark by the Society of American Foresters. It is a steep, three-sided valley cut deeply into the west face of the Greylock massif. It faces west, with Hopper Brook its only gateway. The vertical drop from the summit to the floor (at the intersection of Money and Bacon Brooks) is 2200 feet. The view east from Route 7 directly into the Hopper reveals its striking geometry but only hints at the majesty of the landscape within. Its floor is surprisingly flat, then rises at first gently, then more and more steeply to the summits on its three sides. Its corners are cut by fast-flowing streams, each with a waterfall and cascades. The forest is mixed hard and softwood, including several stands of very old red spruce. Countless spring ephemeral wildflowers grow on the forest floor as well.

### b. McMaster Caves

This cave system, located on land in South Williamstown owned by The Trustees of Reservations (TTOR) is part of TTOR's Field Farm and offers a fine example of how fast-flowing water cutting through marble has created the valleys of Williamstown. This parcel is accessible to the public via a marked trail from Field Farm. A Conservation Restriction on the "Caves Lot" is held jointly by the Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

## 3. Cultural and Historic Areas

### a. Main Street/Town Green

Williamstown's Main Street, nearly 250 feet wide and extending for 1 3/8 miles from the Green River on the east to Buxton Brook on the west, was laid out in 1750. Main Street forms the heart of the Williams Campus and the recently designated Williamstown Cultural District. Field Park, at the center of the Town Green, was originally built in the 19th century by the Village Improvement Society; in the park is a replica of an original regulation house, known as the 1753 House, built along the street at the founding of the town. The park also contains a hand-built stone memorial to Williamstown's veterans. The length of Main Street to the east is still a wide, tree-shaded way lined with College buildings and large houses. Street trees are very prominent along the Town Green but as the current large sugar maples reach their end of lifespan, and many of the Town's ash trees become under threat from EAB, a program should be considered to retain this important urban forest cover. The Williamstown seen by tourists who drive through on either route begins and ends with broad vistas from the north and south or with mountain passes from the east and west, while the town green presents a picture of the typical New England college town.

### b. Williams College Campus

Williams College is nearly as old as Williamstown itself. The sense of history that comes from the old College buildings that line Main Street has been noted above. In addition, just off Route 7 North, the Haystack Monument commemorates the founding of the Foreign Missions in America. All of the Williams College campus is an important cultural area. It offers theater, concerts, lecture halls, libraries, and an art museum. The summer Williamstown Theatre Festival (WTF) takes place here, a new performing arts complex was completed in 2005. In addition the College and the Clark Art Institute sponsor various events throughout the year. These cultural resources greatly enhance the quality of life in the town.

### c. Clark Art Institute

Located in the center of town, this handsome museum is a major tourist attraction, drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors annually. It maintains a collection of impressionist paintings as well as rotating exhibits. It is visited often by tourists, local residents, and school children. It sits at the foot of Stone Hill and owns the open fields that rise behind the main buildings. The Clark maintains a mile-long nature trail on its land on Stone Hill. Additionally Town, College, and Buxton and Pine Cobble School lands adjacent to the Clark have extensive trail systems. These have been unified with a common set of trail markings and directional kiosks through the efforts of the Conservation Commission. The Clark recently completed a major building expansion that has attracted many

visitors from around the world. An outdoor reflecting basin and large open air terrace with views of Stone Hill are a welcome addition to the open spaces in town.

### d. Sand Springs

Sand Springs runs year round at a temperature of 74 degrees Fahrenheit and it has been popular as a swimming area and health retreat dating to pre Colonial times. The pool at the spring now operates as a nonprofit organization. Listed in this section for its historical significance, is it one of three hot springs in the town. The second is at Wire Bridge Farm and is now owned by Williams College as a part of the Hopkins Memorial Forest, a third hot spring is on private land in South Williamstown.

### e. Mt. Hope Farm

Col. E. Parmalee Prentice and his wife, Alta Rockefeller Prentice, daughter of John D. Rockefeller Sr., assembled this property in South Williamstown from four smaller parcels in 1910. During the 1920s and 1930s, Mt. Hope Farm was known throughout the country for its pioneering experiments in animal breeding and husbandry. After the death of the Prentices, the property passed through a number of hands; a consortium of Williams College alumni who have built second homes on the grounds eventually purchased the property. The mansion was donated to Williams College. In 1997, an initiative was begun to bring the mansion up to code and to restore the immediately surrounding grounds. The facility is now used by the College for lectures, retreats, dinners, and other events with students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni.

### f. Hopkins Memorial Forest

This large tract of forested land, which extends from the northwest corner of Williamstown into Vermont and New York, was purchased bit by bit and assembled into a gentleman's farm by Amos Lawrence Hopkins, a railroad executive by profession and the son of a Williams College President. The property's acquisition began in 1887 and its expansion continues today. The land was donated to Williams College in 1934; from 1935 to 1967 the forest was used by the U.S. Forest Service for silviculture and forest genetics research. From 1971 to the present, Hopkins Memorial Forest has been used as an environmental studies field station for student and faculty research.

## 4. Unique Environments

### a. Diverse Forest Communities

Williamstown is home to a wide variety of forest types. Examples of old-growth forest stands are found in the Hopkins Memorial Forest Beinecke Stand (sugar maple and beech) and in the Hopper (hemlock and spruce); a frequently-disturbed floodplain forest with its giant cottonwoods is found in Linear Park near the confluence of the Green and Hoosic Rivers. The top of Mt. Greylock hosts a boreal spruce-fir community; Field Farm and the Green River Wildlife Management Area along New Ashford Road are examples of rich woodlands. The southern slopes of Pine Cobble are inhabited by a southern hardwood (oak-hickory) forest. This vegetative diversity provides important habitat for the fauna of the region.

### b. Rare Environments

Sloping calcareous fens are found on the Town-owned Deans Property and TTOR's Mountain Meadow Property. These are rare communities that are currently being protected by the Conservation Commission and TTOR. In addition, Bullock's Ledge and Pine Cobble provide habitat for the endangered hairy honeysuckle *Lonicera hirsuta*.

### c. Agricultural Land

There is significant productive farmland forming a belt across southern Williamstown. It stretches from just north of the Mt. Greylock State Reservation across to the west, reaching almost all the way to the Taconic Range. Much of this land is currently used for grazing and haying; some is used for cultivation as well. The Williamstown farm belt has a large region of overlap with the scenic landscape described in section F.1.a. The decline of agriculture throughout New England makes this open farmland part of a scarce and disappearing resource and habitat type.

### d. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

There are no state-listed Areas of Critical Environmental Concern within the Williamstown town limits.

## G. Environmental Challenges

While Williamstown's overall environmental quality is quite high, significant environmental problems still exist. The greatest challenges facing Williamstown's environmental quality at the current time are the large scale macro level changes from climate change and the spread of invasive species. The town and other community stakeholders will have to take these challenges into account as planning for future endeavors unfolds.

### 1. Hazardous Waste and Brownfield Sites

The former Phototech site on Cole Avenue is Williamstown's most serious hazardous waste site. The building was abandoned in 1989, and the Town took the parcel via eminent domain in 2007. A partial asbestos cleanup was completed in June, 2003, but sections of the building were not cleaned up due to dangerous structural problems. In August, 2003, the main section of the mill was demolished. By securing various grants, the Town has been able to remediate the site so that it can be marketed for productive use and it is currently being evaluated for affordable housing. Williamstown residents also have cause for concern about the possibility of leaching and contamination from some hazardous waste areas upstream on the Hoosic River in North Adams. The presence of PCBs in the river is documented as well, although the presence is minimal compared to other waterways regionally.

### 2. Landfills

There are many former landfill and waste disposal sites in Williamstown. The official Williamstown Landfill (on the Moore Property) was closed and capped in 1997, and this facility now serves as a transfer station from which Williamstown's solid waste is hauled to certified disposal sites. The old Cole Field Landfill, adjacent to the Hoosic River, is located in close proximity to the Williams College athletic fields and is also the site of some walking trails. Whenever the river is high, landfill debris and sediments are carried downstream. It is expected that the future Williamstown North Adams Bike Path will pass through this site; some remediation will be completed at that time. Water quality tests have determined that the Cole Field Landfill does not have significant adverse effects on the Hoosic River. There are several other old landfill sites in Williamstown that are in similar situations to that of the Cole Field Landfill.

### 3. Erosion

Erosion is a natural occurrence in Williamstown. There is a history of landslides, large and small, on the steep slopes of Mt. Greylock. The most recent large one occurred in 1990. The threat of erosion on Williamstown's hillsides, with their thin soils and areas of steep slope, is a prime reason for the prohibition of development above the 1300' level. In this sense, erosion has helped justify the preservation of open space. The banks of the Hoosic and Green Rivers are also subject to periodic erosion, particularly during the heavy precipitation events, causing some threat to residences along the riverbank.

### 4. Flooding

Chronic flooding occurs along both the Green and Hoosic Rivers. The Green River, whose channel makes some sharp meanders, is subject to ice jams in the winter and spring months. The Hoosic is a wider, straighter river, less subject to ice jams, but prone to seasonal flooding. Flood chutes upriver in Adams and North Adams have increased the volume of flood water reaching Williamstown. Much of the open space along the river is in the floodway or flood zone. Thus recreation development in these areas is limited to trails, river access, picnic areas, and other uses that can tolerate periodic flooding. In 2011 Tropical Storm Irene resulted in the flooding of the Spruces Mobile Home Park and the eventual closing of the Park.

### 5. Sedimentation

Sedimentation is a problem in many areas of Williamstown. With the exception of the siltation resulting from periodic flooding, siltation in Williamstown is usually a consequence of development and is discussed later in this section under Item 6.

### 6. Development Impact

Development has aggravated Williamstown's environmental problems. Its impact has been felt in all parts of town as developmental activities have disturbed soil stability, changed drainage patterns, and altered natural habitat. Open space and recreational areas in the center of town have suffered degradation as described elsewhere in this section. The Pine Cobble Development, which was begun in 1988, is a subdivision of single family homes designed for Williams College faculty, and one of the first attempts to site a large residential development on a Williamstown hillside. Because of the site's steep topography, severe slumping, sinking, erosion, and siltation occurred during the clearing and construction. The College was forced to implement expensive correction measures. This site has since stabilized and now hosts dozens of homes, but the problems experienced during its development underscore the necessity of careful planning for development in Williamstown.

### 7. Ground and Surface Water Pollution

Surface water resources are most threatened by pollution. The groundwater resource of the Confined Aquifer is protected by the sediments under which it is confined and by the water resource protection district. The two surface water reservoirs, now used only for backup, are protected from pollution by their distance from development, but are subject to pollution from sedimentation in rainy seasons. Two of Williamstown's in-town ponds suffer from significant pollution. Eph's Pond, located on the edge of the College athletic fields and near the Hoosic River, receives runoff from the

College campus. It is heavily silted and has shown evidence of pollution from organic compounds. Bridges Pond, which is a town-owned conservation pond, is polluted by runoff from developed areas above, from its location near the railroad, and from its proximity to two of Williamstown's former landfills. It is contaminated with heavy metals and is also experiencing invasion by exotic species such as Purple Loosestrife.

### 8. Impaired Water Bodies

The Williamstown sections of the Hoosic River and the Green River are listed on the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's 303(d) list of impaired waters. Both of these rivers are included in Section 5: "Waters Requiring A TMDL [Total Maximum Daily Load (for pollutants)]." The Green River is cited for organic enrichment and pathogens. The Hoosic is cited for the presence of priority organics, nutrients, and pathogens. HooRWA is currently waiting to hear from the DEP about TMDLs and required monitoring.

### 9. Others

Air quality due to industry and development to the west is an issue in Williamstown. Like much of New England, Williamstown experiences acid rain and pollution from coal burning power plants in the Midwest. However from time to time projects that could negatively impact the community's air quality have been considered in nearby communities. Williamstown must maintain an awareness of such projects and their potential impacts. Proposals for the exploration and development of alternative energy sources in Williamstown and the surrounding areas also raise environmental concerns. The siting and construction of wind turbines, hydroelectric plants, and solar panels can have impacts on soil, vegetation, and animal species. The potential benefits of these technologies are great, and renewable energy should continue to be explored, but responsible development of the facilities must also be a priority.

**5) Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest**

Williamstown encompasses 30,000.5 acres, 24,827 of which are designated as open lands (Town of Williamstown – Open Lands Map). This equates to 83% of the total area of the town (Figure 2). As of the 2010 census, there were 7,754 residents, meaning Williamstown has approximately 3.2 acres of open space per person. However, open lands can be either public or private, and so some of this is not available to the general population. Additionally, some of these parcels are not permanently protected. In an assessment of permanently protected lands in the eight towns of Berkshire County, the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission found that Williamstown has the smallest proportion of permanently protected land (29%, Figure 1, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission). The Mount Greylock State Reservation constitutes the largest proportion of open space in Williamstown, and it is fully open to the public.

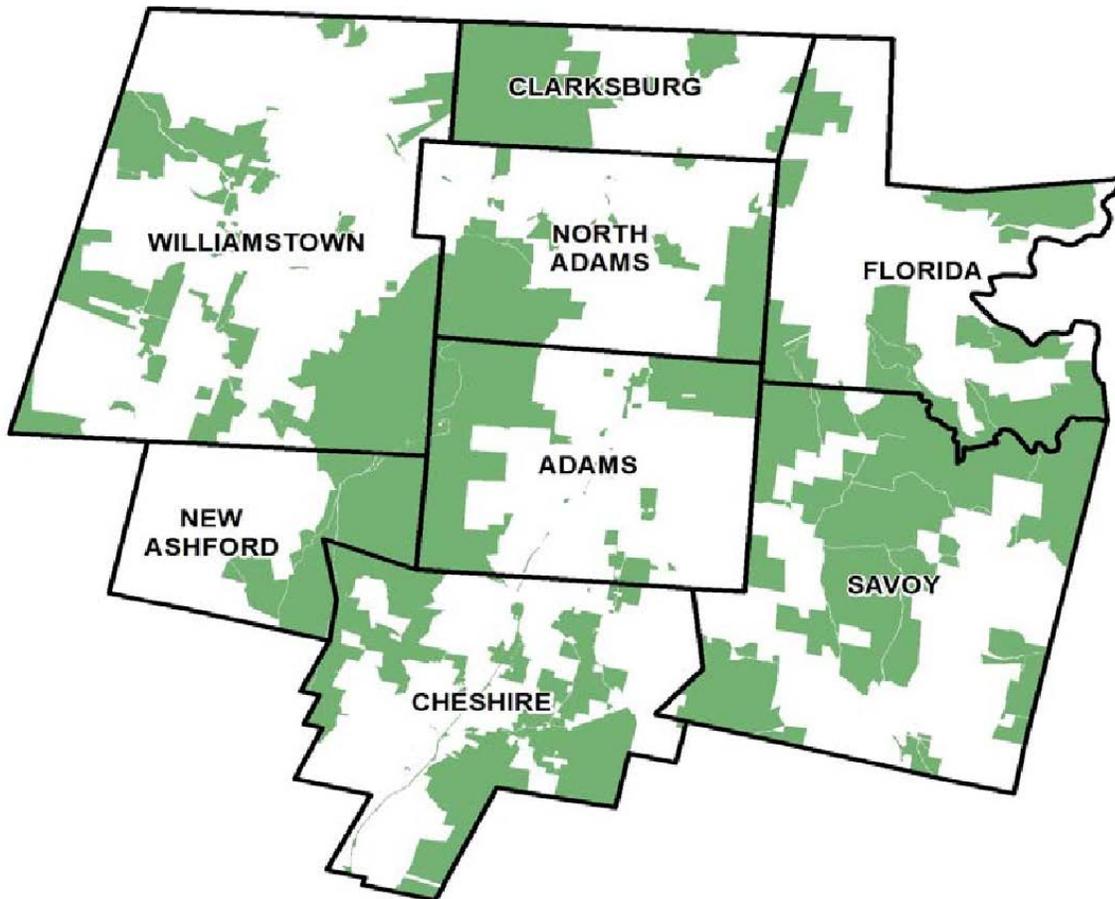


Figure 1. Permanently protected lands (green shading) in Berkshire County. (From Berkshire Regional Planning Commission)

The official town map of open lands includes eight classifications: Chapter 61, Chapter 61 A, Chapter 61 B, restricted, nonprofit, state land, town owned land, and unprotected land. (Appendix A). There are overlaps between certain categories of land, particularly between the various Chapter 61 designations and restricted land. (Overlapping classifications were removed in Figure 2.) The acreage of each open space designation is shown in Figure 2.

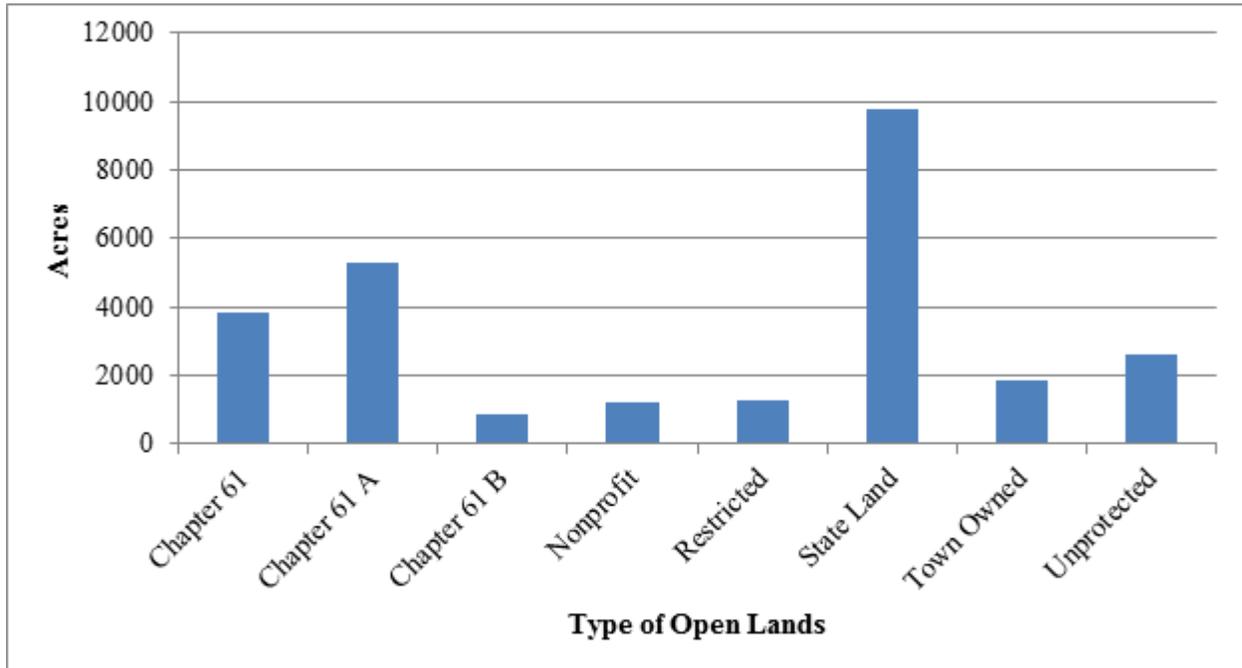


Figure 2. Acreage of lands designated as open space in Williamstown, Massachusetts. (From Town of Williamstown – Open Lands shape files.)

A) Private Lands

*Chapter 61 Lands*

Chapter 61 lands are undeveloped lands (minimum 10 acres) taxed at a lower rate than lands taxed at development value. If the land use is changed or repurposed for development, the owner pays a penalty to account for the previous tax breaks. Chapter 61 refers specifically to forest lands and lands where forest products (e.g. timber) are produced. Chapter 61 A designates agricultural and horticultural lands, including the 28 farms currently operating in Williamstown. Chapter 61 B includes recreational lands. The majority of all Chapter 61 lands in Williamstown are privately owned parcels, which are not typically accessible to the general public. However, 61 B recreational lands include the

Taconic Golf Course (owned by Williams College) , the Waubeeka Golf Course, and the Mount Greylock Ski Club. A summary of Chapter 61, 61 A, and 61 B lands is provided in Table 2

Table 2. Chapter 61, 61 A, and 61 B lands in Williamstown, Massachusetts (from Town of Williamstown shape files).

	Acres	Number of Parcels	Average Parcel Size (acres)
Chapter 61	3,852	53	72.7
Chapter 61 A	5,296	118	44.9
Chapter 61 B	886	12	73.9

*Restricted Lands*

Many Chapter 61 lands are also considered restricted lands. Restrictions may include Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR) and Conservation Restrictions (CR). In Williamstown, 13 parcels have APRs, and 21 have CRs. Most of these are relatively small, privately owned parcels of land and a number are open to the public. (Average size of restricted parcels is 35 acres [Town of Williamstown – Open Lands Map]). In total, there are 1,296 acres of restricted land distributed among 37 parcels, accounting for 4.3 percent of the town. Although restrictions are placed voluntarily by owners, resulting deeds are permanent restrictions on land use. Depending on the specific restriction, prohibitions are placed on use of property that could negatively impact agricultural or environmental viability or integrity.

*Other Land Resources*

A large portion (2,594 acres, 8.6%) of Williamstown is classified as unprotected open space (Town of Williamstown – Open Lands Map). Much of this property is part of Hopkins Memorial Forest (HMF), which is owned by Williams College. In total, the forest is approximately 2,600 acres, most of which is in Williamstown, although the forest also extends into bordering New York and Vermont. HMF includes a network of trails where low-impact recreational activities such as hiking, jogging, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and dog walking are encouraged. Hunting and horseback riding are also permitted to a limited degree. The forest also has a variety of public education and outreach programs throughout the year. HMF is designated as an educational facility and research

forest, and it is host to a variety of long-term studies and scientific experimentation. The Clark Art Institute owns 138 acres of unprotected land, most of which is wooded. This property includes an interpretive nature trail and a variety of other paths that are open to the general public.

### B) Public Lands

#### *Nonprofits*

Three nonprofit organizations own property within Williamstown: Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation (WRLF), The Trustees of Reservations (TTOR), and Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC). In sum, these organizations own 1,207 acres or 4% of the town land. WRLF owns the majority of this land, including Sheep Hill (a former farm, now open for passive recreation and a variety of cultural and natural history programs), portions of Pine Cobble (a popular hiking destination and overlook) and numerous trails throughout Williamstown. The stated goal of WRLF is “to preserve open and accessible space for the benefit of present and future generations.”

The Trustees of Reservations also owns Field Farm (141 acres), which has a series of popular bird watching areas and paths as well as a small pond, and Mountain Meadow, which includes a trail from Williamstown into neighboring Pownal, Vermont. BNRC owns one 210 acre property (Kelly Property) along the Taconic Range. Although it includes some woods roads, they are unmarked. Hunting is allowed on this property.

Despite the accessibility and extensive availability of trails in Williamstown, general maintenance has been noted as an issue for many trails throughout Williamstown (public comments during Conservation Commission meeting).

#### *Town Lands*

The Town of Williamstown owns 1,865 acres, 6.2% of the town’s total area (Town of Williamstown – Open Lands Map). This summation includes areas that are generally not used for recreational activities, such as all town cemeteries, the Hoosac Water Quality District sewage treatment plant, and the town garage. Nine properties, however, are managed by the Conservation Commission. These properties are technically open to the public, although their accessibility varies. Conservation Commission lands and their general uses are listed in Table 4. Other Town owned properties used for recreation purposes but not controlled by the Conservation Commission include the Blair property at the northern summit of Brodie Mountain, the Mills Hollow property along the Taconic Ridge, along with the Sherman Springs and Rattlesnake Reservoir properties controlled by the

Water Department. Despite the Rattlesnake property's location across the border in Vermont it does represent a significant town owned recreational resource.

Additionally important is the newly acquired former Spruces Mobile Home Park off of Main Street. The Spruces property consists of about 125 acres, including about 42 acres which was the site of a mobile home community that flooded during Hurricane Irene in 2011. The remaining acreage is in agricultural use and will remain so except for a bike path around the perimeter. The mobile homes and buildings have been removed and as of early 2016 the site is vacant. The Committee is charged to recommend plans for the Spruces as a park, consistent with the terms of a Hazard Mitigation Grant awarded the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The FEMA grant funded most of the effort to relocate Spruces residents and to vacate the property. The terms of the FEMA grant and conditions impose certain restrictions on what can be done with the land in the future. These restrictions indicate that the future use of the land is best suited as a park and for the ongoing use as agricultural land. Through the work of MassDOT a bike path is being designed to run primarily along the river to the north of the site.

Table 3. Williamstown Conservation Commission Lands and their general uses.

Property	Acres	Uses
Bloedel Park	1	Park with green space and limited seating
Bridges Pond	25.8	Small pond that may be used for walking and birdwatching; limited access, and access through railroad property is strictly prohibited; some contamination issues
Burbank Farm	130	Currently used for agriculture
Deans Property	45	Fragile ecological area; public use is not recommended
Hunter Property	176.5	Forested area available for passive recreation
Lowry Farm	30	Currently used for agriculture
Margaret Lindley Park	8.7	Park with picnic and swimming areas

Pine Cobble	9.8	Forested area surrounded by other conservation land; may be used for hiking
Stone Hill	56	Forested area with trails used for hiking and running

*State Lands*

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns 9,803 acres, equivalent to 32.7% of the town’s total area (Town of Williamstown – Open Lands Map). Much of this is undeveloped land, part of the Mount Greylock State Reservation and the Taconic Trail State Park. These areas are primarily devoted to passive outdoor recreation and variously come under the purview of the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Division of State Parks and Recreation, Department of Environmental Management, and Department of Public Works.

. Mount Greylock, the highest peak in Massachusetts and with a historical monument at the summit, is a popular hiking and tourist destination. Regardless of protection status, the area’s rough terrain precludes many other uses.

C) Indoor Recreation Spaces

*Williams College*

Williams College has extensive recreational facilities for students and opens many of their spaces, both indoor and outdoor, to the public. Jim Kolesar, Williams College Vice President for Public Affairs, stated that the college is very open to Williamstown residents using College properties and that “it’s a happy byproduct of having so much recreational space that local people get to use it.” He particularly appreciated that the public uses Cole Field for walking dogs and that the College has been able to help facilitate the winter portion of the Bay State Games, a three day statewide athletic competition. Gary Guerin, the Associate Director for Operations/Athletics, echoed the sentiments of Kolesar, emphasizing the cooperative relationship between Williams and the surrounding community, particularly local schools. For example, the Williams cross-country team uses a course at Mount Greylock High School, while the College opens its turf fields to youth lacrosse and soccer and allows people to use tennis and paddle tennis courts.

However, there are limitations on the College’s ability to provide recreational space to the community. Gym memberships are free for staff and faculty of Williams. For other community members, a full-year membership is \$450/family and \$290/individual. During winter break, the

facilities are closed because students are gone (Kolesar). In general, the College prioritizes its own needs, as it is operating and maintaining the spaces (Kolesar). While Kolesar did not see any issue with community use of Williams facilities, he did express concern that “town government has felt less need to provide recreational space because the College has so many facilities.” Again, Guerin echoed the concerns of Kolesar, saying that the College cannot fully “accommodate people once things move inside” in the winter. In short, Williams College is happy to contribute to town recreation wherever possible, but its capacity is not great enough to provide for all the residents.

### *Williamstown Youth Center*

The Youth Center, located on School Street, is also an asset to town recreation. The Youth Center was originally started by Williams College Students in the 1930s and has operated continuously since then (Rempell). In November of 2012, the Center opened a new facility with classrooms and a half-size gym next to the Williamstown Elementary School. They offer before- and after-school programs, school vacation and summer camps, and run snow day activities. In addition, they rent out space to the Berkshire Dance Theatre weekly and to other groups on occasion. The Youth Center is a private non-profit organization, which receives funding from program fees, donations, and the Community Chest. The town also makes an annual appropriation to the Youth Center. David Rempell, the director of the Youth Center, explains that “the Youth Center takes on some of the needs of the town” because Williamstown does not have a recreation department to run programs (Rempell).

Rempell highlighted the lack of a bike path and the inadequate capacity of indoor gyms as two major weaknesses in Williamstown recreation. The Youth Center used to run a cycling camp, but he explains, “Without a dedicated bike path, I feel it is too dangerous to take children out for bike rides. A bike path by Cole Field would strongly encourage us to restart a cycling program. “The Youth Center also struggles to find adequate gym space for all of their sports programs. They have a half-gym and rent out the Elementary School gym for basketball, but this is not always enough for their needs. In addition, their use of the gym pushes out adult groups who would like to play basketball. While he sees this as an issue, he believes the town can’t afford to spend a large amount of money on a new facility that would only be used during the winter months (Rempell).

### *Harper Center*

The Harper Center, located on Church Street, is a public facility that runs programs for senior citizens in Williamstown. It is primarily used by residents of the housing development at Proprietors Field, but it is open to Williamstown residents. There is a bus station for the Berkshire Regional

Transport Authority at the Harper Center, which is helpful to those residents who cannot drive. The Center also runs shuttles of its own and can take residents to places for recreation if trips are planned in advance (O'Grady) There are games and puzzles in the recreation center as well as sidewalks outside. The Harper Center holds events like holiday celebrations and weekly bingo. In addition, there are art classes and fitness classes geared toward senior citizens.

## 6) Community Vision

### A) Description of the Process

#### 1) 2013 Survey and Outreach

A public survey was conducted in Autumn of 2013. In addition to the survey, the Conservation Commission held an open forum discussion for public input related to the OSRP. Senior citizens were also given an opportunity to voice their opinions at a meeting in the Harper Center. Finally, pre-teens and teens at the public middle and high schools participated in focus groups. Some of the major findings from the surveys and focus groups are desires for better recreation opportunities for teens, a bike path, and improved water access. In addition, there is a need for increased awareness about the lands and facilities that already exist. These community opinions are the basis of the recommendations for improvements to open space and recreation in this report.

The public survey was based on a similar survey written and conducted by a student group working to develop an OSRP for North Adams in 2012. The survey was mailed to 460 residents, randomly selected from the Williamstown voter registry. As of the 2010 census, there were 2,638 households in Williamstown, so the survey reached approximately 20% of Williamstown households. The survey had 13 questions, which asked residents to rank their most important recreational activities and locations, identify strengths and weaknesses in Williamstown's open land, and rank priorities for new public uses of land. Each of these questions allowed space for comments so that additional qualitative information could be received from the survey. Of the 460 surveys sent out, a total of 149 responses (approximately 32%) were received. The surveys presented a varied picture of Williamstown residents' recreational habits and are presented in Section 7.

#### 2. - 2015 Surveys and Outreach

The Spruces Land Use Committee ("Committee" or "SLUC"), successor to the Reuse Team mentioned above, was formally appointed by the Williamstown Board of Selectmen in 2013, and is in the process of planning for the re-use of the Spruces property. SLUC's work to date has included following a process to determine the public's preferences for future use of the Spruces property, and to analyze how those preferences align with the uses allowed by the FEMA grant terms and regulations. In the Spring of 2015, the SLUC sent out a survey to approximately 3600 property owners with their tax bills, asking for the public's preferences for future uses of the Spruces property. Respondents were asked to score their preferences for a list of 14 possible uses on a scale of 1 through 5, with 1 being low preference and 5 being high preference. Over 500 responses were received. The results of the survey are set out in Section 7, below.

Two other relevant surveys were conducted in 2015. First, The Williamstown Economic Development Committee (EDC) conducted public outreach forums and a survey at the same time and to the same recipients as the SLUC survey in 2015. The EDC final report, Strategies for Economic Development in Williamstown, Massachusetts, (EDC Report) was published in December 2015 and shows that a wide variety of suggestions relevant to open space, recreation and the proposed Spruces program were made. Second, a Berkshire County Age Friendly survey was conducted in the Spring of 2015. There were responses from 127 Williamstown residents. The responses from both these surveys are discussed in Section 7.

### 6B – Statement of Goals

Based on the information received during the survey and outreach efforts, the following are community goals for open space and recreation:

Goal 1: Ensure resource protection for lands with priority environmental and visual value

Goal 2: Develop and maintain recreational bikeways and walking paths accessible to the community

Goal 3: Support agricultural land preservation

Goal 4: Develop and maintain access to waterways

Goal 5: Ensure adequate stewardship resources and funding

## 7) Analysis of Needs

### A) Local Resource Protection Needs

A Williams College Environmental Studies team in the Fall of 2014 utilized GIS analysis from multiple sources. These included the Conservation Assessment and Prioritization System (CAPS) developed by UMass Amherst. This is a statewide GIS layer designed to be a marker of ecological integrity. Other data sources included Natural Heritage and Endangered Species program maps of estimated and priority habitats, trail buffers, steep slope contours, watersheds, old growth forest tracts derived from the Harvard 1830s forest map, and slow growing coniferous stands.

#### 1) Methodologies & WRLF Criteria

The Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation (WRLF) has created a document of conservation prioritization criteria. This includes a list of attributes, two of which should be fulfilled by every parcel of land considered for conservation. These attributes include:

- Linking areas of existing protection
- Protecting water resources - rivers, streams and wetlands; watersheds; aquifers
- Protecting species diversity, rare species habitat and other significant habitat, or enhancing the protection of these ecosystems
- Protecting working farm and forest lands
- Enhancing the protection of ridge tops (Taconics, Pine Cobble, Brodie Mt., Greylock area)
- Promoting or protecting existing greenways and trails, provide access to now inaccessible significant parcels and new trail development and expanded recreational opportunities

The goal of this analysis was to differentiate parcels of land that fulfilled two or more of these criteria using the data acquired. In order to accomplish this unconserved land was first separated from conserved by selecting and exporting relevant land-use parcels from the MassGIS data. Utilizing a ranking matrix and rubric allowed the GIS analysis to highlight areas of highest conservation need.

#### 2) Rubric Development

The WRLF Criteria were used alongside habitat data to create a conservation priority rubric on which to rank parcels for their conservation value. This rubric assigns each attribute an importance level and a corresponding point value. This allowed consideration of not only which parcels have which attributes, but the relative priority of different attributes. However, one of the most important things to note is that these points can be altered based on varying conservation priorities. The priorities of WRLF and the Conservation Commission were utilized for purposes of this analysis. The series of

maps that illustrate the complexity of this analysis are attached to this document in Appendix B: Resource Protection Maps

### 3) Summary of Natural Resource Needs

There are three primary reasons for conserving land in Williamstown, all of which can be backed up by the previously discussed GIS analysis. First, there is undeveloped land in town. Second, much of this land is poorly suited to development, because of access, slope etc. Third, there is extraordinary amount of habitat that is important on a state level. Very little of the land area of Williamstown is densely settled or developed. One effect of this is the large number of parcels (282) deemed to fit at least two of the top four WRLF conservation criteria.. Of this undeveloped land, much of it is excellent quality in terms of ecological integrity, as demonstrated by the CAPS data. Almost 30% of the land area of Williamstown falls in the top 10% of most ecologically intact land in the State of Massachusetts.

## B) Community Needs

### 1. Results of 2013 Surveys and Outreach

. Unfortunately, many respondents to the 2013 survey simply used check marks rather than the ranking system. Rankings thus presented too many errors to retain any statistical significance. We therefore calculated the total number of surveys that marked each location and activity, regardless of ranking. When asked about the location of recreational activities, respondents marked neighborhood (81 surveys), trails (88 surveys) and home (95 surveys) the most (Figure 3).

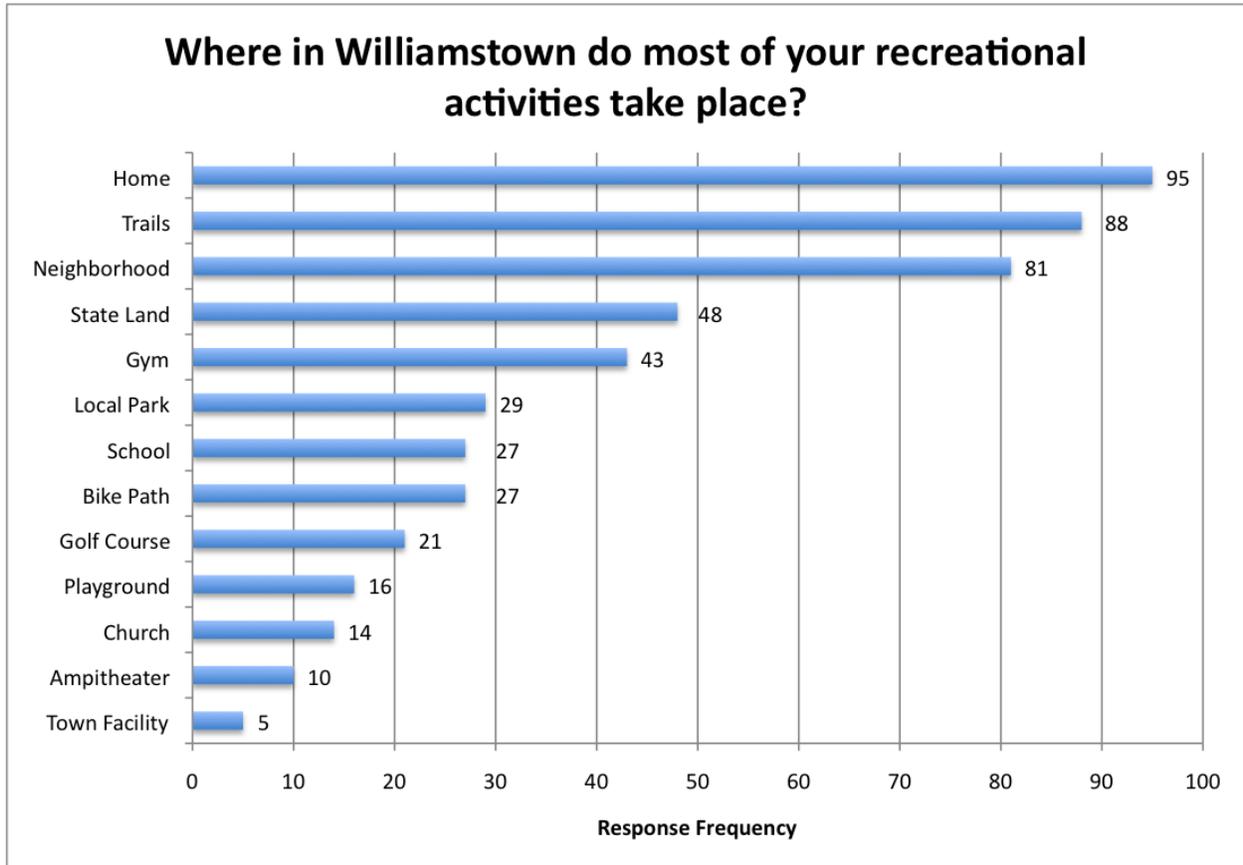
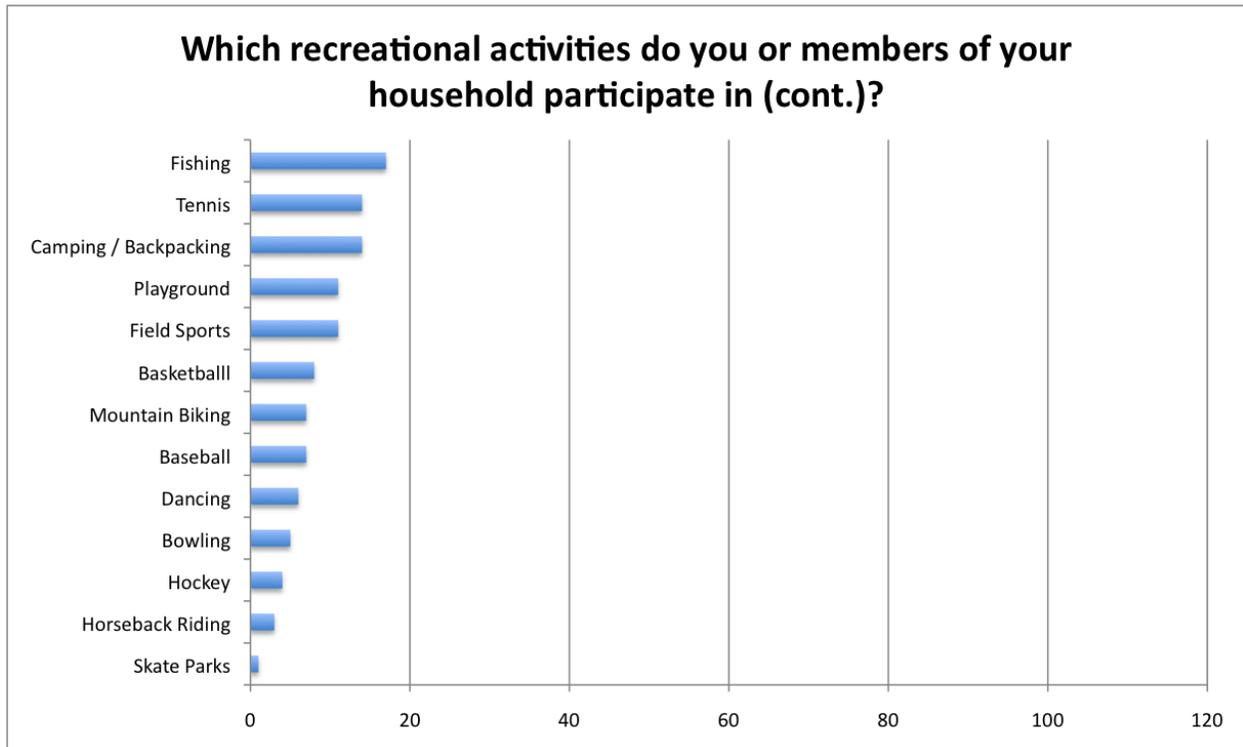
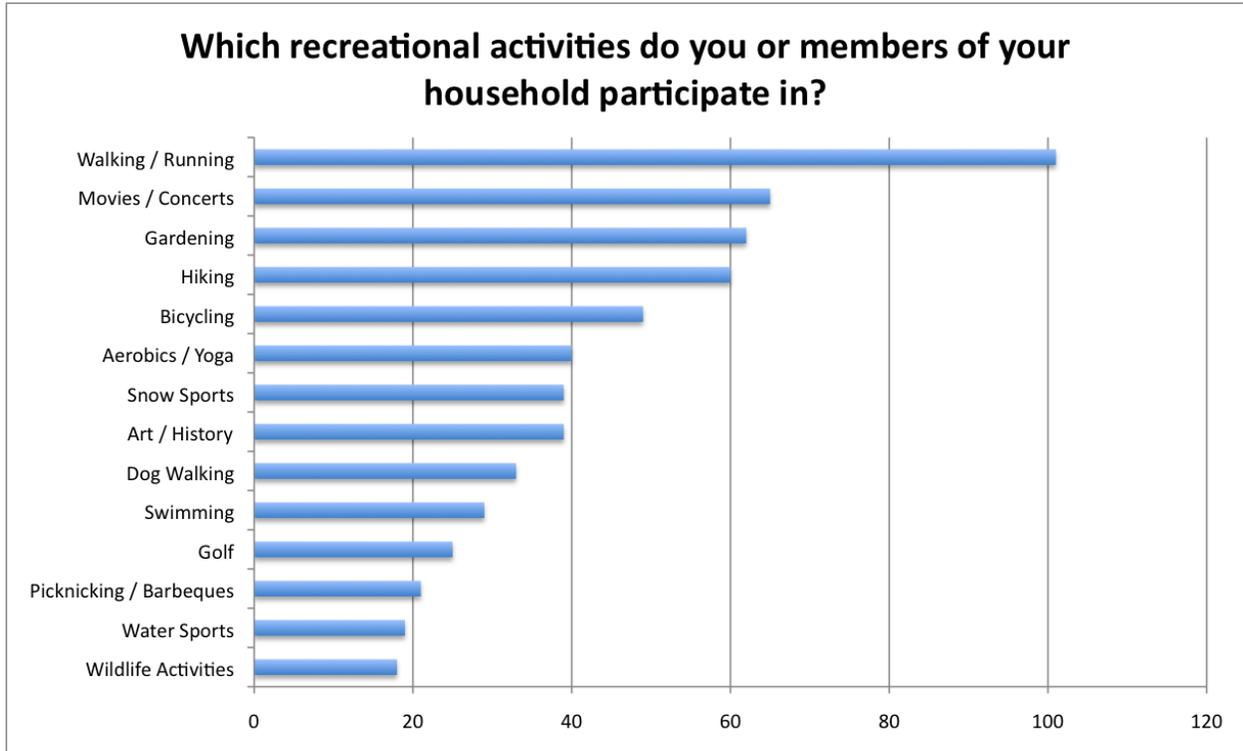


Figure 3. Frequency of locations used for recreation.

According to the survey, the most common recreational activities are hiking (60 surveys), gardening (62 surveys), movies and concerts (65 surveys) and finally walking and running (101 surveys) (Figures 4 and 5).



Figures 4 and 5. Frequency of recreational activities in Williamstown.

These results reflect the wealth of natural recreational resources the town provides, as well as demographics of the town. Williamstown has a strong network of trails and a population that enjoys taking advantage of such a resource. Nevertheless, these same areas were a high priority for residents when asked which public uses of available land they would like to see increased (Figure 5). Public recreation and conservation areas received the best average ranking out of the six options provided. Historical preservation scored lowest, suggesting that residents do not feel this is a high priority (Figure 6)

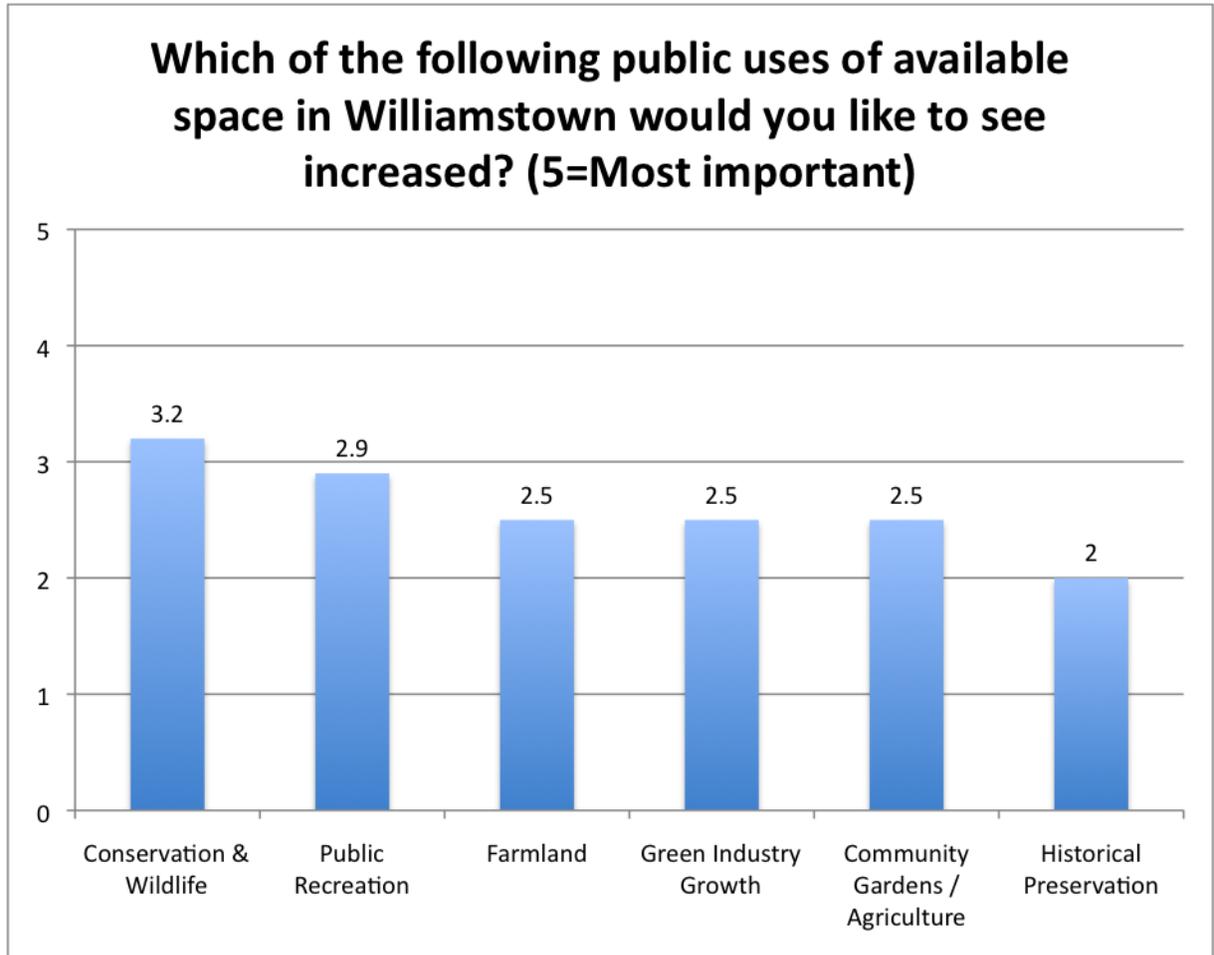


Figure 6. Average rankings for use of public land.

Even though public recreation and conservation areas are generally looked at positively by members of the Williamstown community, there appears to be room and demand for improvement. These results will inform recommendations in future OSRP discussions.

Overall satisfaction with the facilities and resources available, however, presented a much more divided picture. When asked about satisfaction with the offerings for children, teens, adults, elderly and disabled, the surveys resulted in much more variance. Williamstown residents are generally satisfied with facilities for children and adults, both indoors and outdoors (Figures 7 and 8)

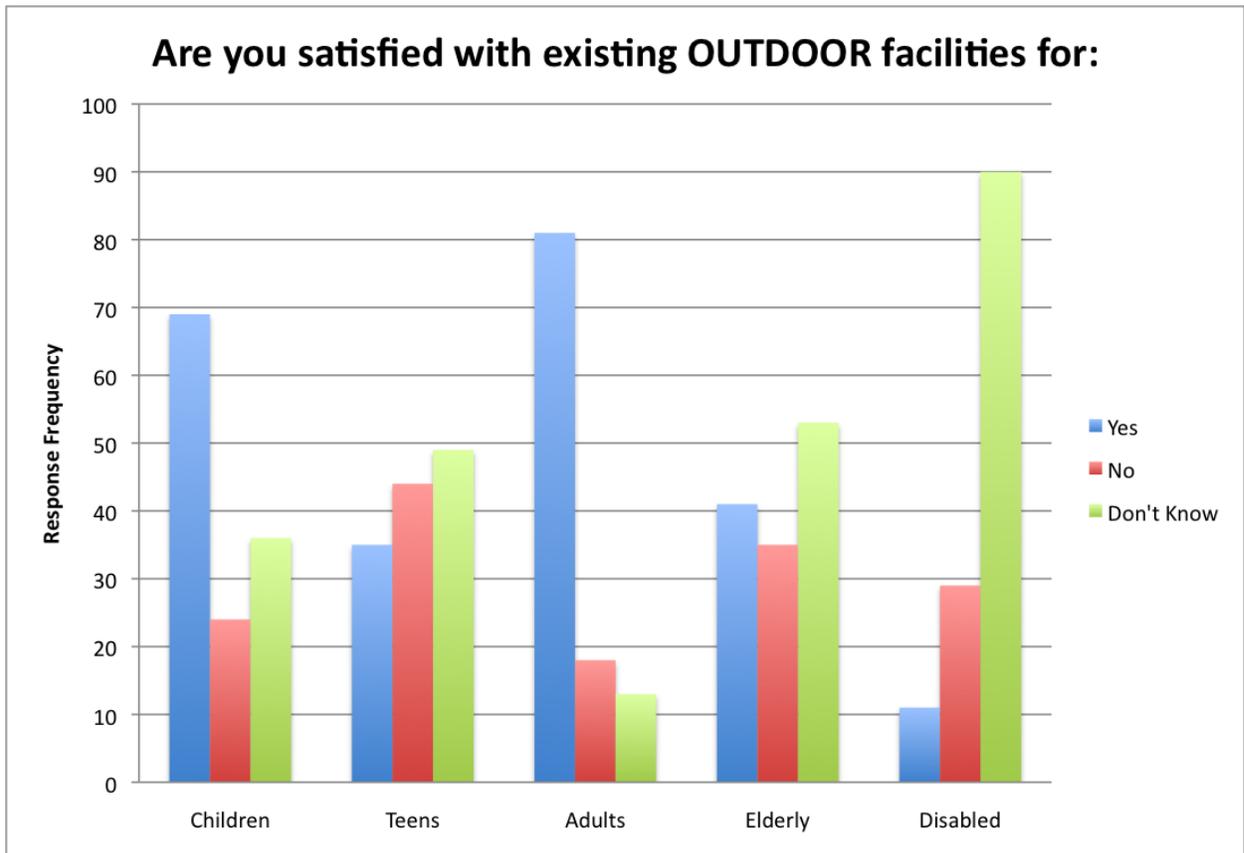


Figure 7. Satisfaction with Williamstown outdoor facilities.

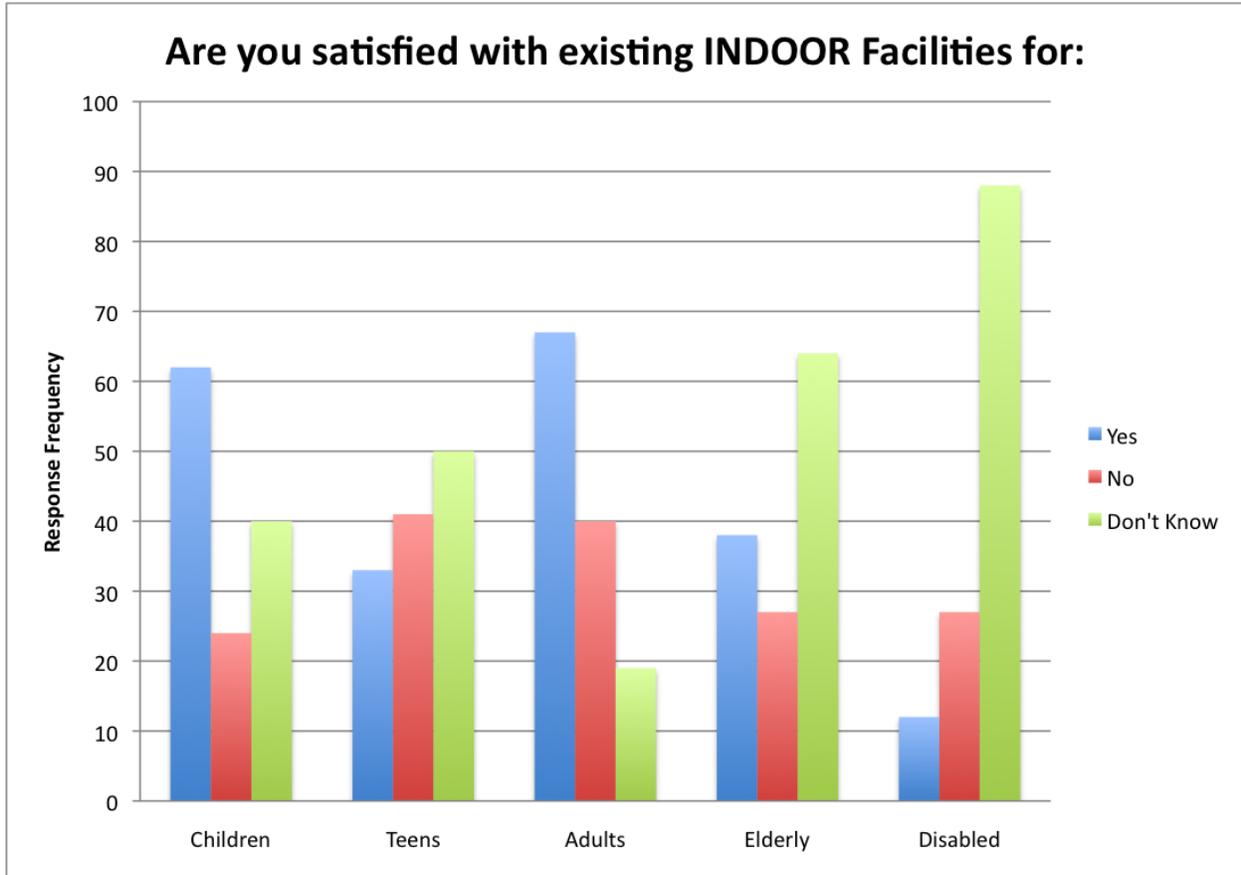


Figure 8. Satisfaction with Williamstown indoor facilities.

Many respondents did not know if they were satisfied with facilities for the elderly and disabled or not. It may be difficult for residents to make an informed judgment on this question if they are not members or closely related to members of this demographic group. However, more respondents were dissatisfied than satisfied with facilities for teens in both the indoor and outdoor studies. These results identify a need for targeted planning with teenagers in mind.

Respondents were given an opportunity to indicate which specific areas of recreation are strengths and those that are weaknesses in potential need of improvement (Figure 9).

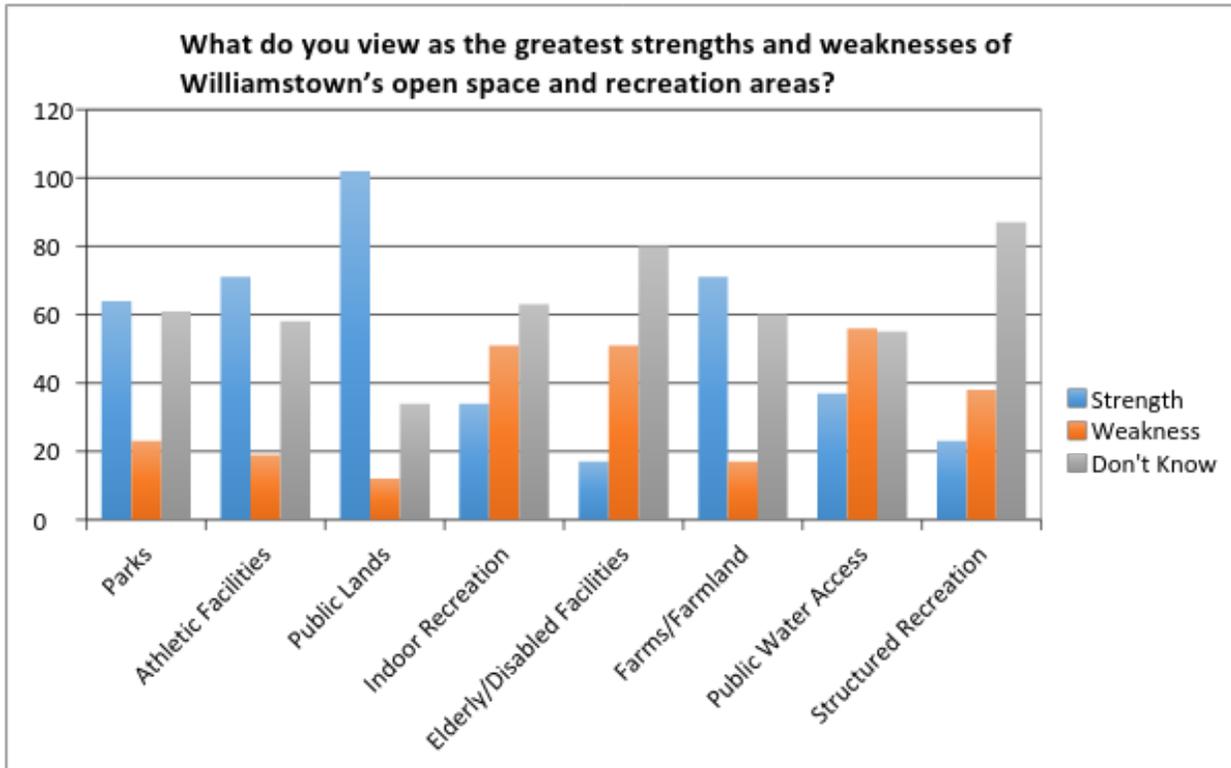


Figure 9. Strengths and weaknesses of Williamstown open space and recreational facilities.

As in Figures 7 and 8, many people did not know the status of facilities for the elderly and disabled, likely because they are not members of these groups. Many respondents were also unsure if structured recreation is a strength or weakness, perhaps due to lack of clarity regarding the meaning of the phrase “structured recreation.” A majority of people considered public lands a strength and satisfaction with parks, athletic facilities, and farmlands were high. The biggest need for improvement is public water access, with 56 surveys indicating it as a weakness.

Surveys allowed for respondents to write expanded comments on each question and at the bottom of the last page, twenty-four survey respondents (16%) wrote in that Williamstown should have a bike path, and several people indicated that they currently bike on roads, which are less safe. In addition, several of the respondents indicated that they rely heavily on Williams College facilities for recreation. Some people questioned this relationship. One person commented, “We rely on the College for recreation - this is unfair to those who are not part of the college community. We need more low-cost or open facilities separate from the college.”

The Conservation Commission also held a public meeting at the Harper Center to solicit comment on the planning process. The meeting was publicized through survey cover letters, the town website, and local newspaper announcements. The surveys were distributed to the attendees, although these were kept separate from the other responses in order to maintain the randomness of our survey. 14 people attended, including one reporter. Following an introduction to OSRPs by Henry Art of the Conservation Commission, the format of the meeting was open, and people were encouraged to share their opinions on existing open spaces and possible room for improvement. They suggested new paths, new centers for recreation, improved maintenance of trails, and changes to make biking safer.

### 2. Focus Groups

On October 31, 2013, a focus group session with senior citizens at the Harper Center was held, timed in conjunction with a Halloween lunch for local senior citizens. Seniors were given the opportunity to complete a survey and voice their concerns and requests surrounding recreation. Overall, most of the seniors were content with the available recreational facilities of Williamstown, but they did have some suggestions to better accommodate their needs. Several seniors requested more benches along walking paths that do not go through the center of Williamstown and wished to have a large town park with a green, walking paths, playgrounds, and outdoor swimming. They appreciated availability of the Williams College indoor walking track but found the hours often inconvenient. Finally, many seniors did not recognize the names of some of the parks and open spaces included in the survey. They suggested better advertisement to inform the general public of the opportunities currently available.

Focus groups were also held with students, the first was with a group of thirteen junior and senior students at Mt. Regional High School on October 25. Students were given the same surveys and encouraged to have an open discussion about their recreational needs within Williamstown. Participants “explicitly expressed a desire for community basketball courts with lighting, an area with better river access than what is currently available, and an indoor community center”. The students noted that they currently rely on Williams College for many of these needs, although “some articulated that this dependence was often inconvenient because of the inconsistent availability of the spaces”.

A second focus group with approximately 25-30 middle school students at Mt. Greylock Regional School was held on November 1. The team orally administered surveys, interviewed small groups of students, and fostered open discussion. The most popular suggestions included a ropes course, drive-in theater, and basketball courts.

3. Results of 2015 Surveys and Outreach

As noted above. The 2015 SLUC survey resulted in over 500 responses to a question asking residents to rank their preferences on options for uses of the Spruces on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being highest. Please note that the last four uses listed below were not asked about in the survey because they would be part of any program or, in the case of food bank agricultural use, were proposed after the survey was completed.

Figure 10, SLUC 2015 Survey Form

Question:	Average Score	Allowed if pervious materials and <u>no fences</u>
1. Paths for walking, running, and skiing.	4.3	Yes
2. Bike paths	4.2	Yes
3. Access to river. practical for launching	4.2	Yes but not boat
4. Outdoor event space	3.6	Yes
5. Pavilion for events.	3.4	Yes if no walls
6. Playground.	3.4	Yes
7. Community gardens—resident managed plots	3.4	Yes
9. Maintain current farmland in agricultural use	3.4	Yes
10. Seasonal Skating Rink	3.3	Yes if removable?
11. Athletic fields (baseball, soccer, volleyball)	3.0	Yes
<b>12. Dog Park</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>No - fenced</b>
<b>13. Tennis Courts fenced</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>No - impervious and</b>
<b>14. Basketball Courts</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>No - impervious</b>
15. Bathroom facilities	n/a	Yes
16. Picnic facilities	n/a	Yes
17. Parking	n/a	Yes
18. Food bank agricultural	n/a	Yes

The proposed uses also were evaluated against the restrictions imposed by the FEMA grant and regulations which, as relevant here, generally prohibit impervious materials, fences that could block the flow of floodwaters and buildings with walls, except for bathroom facilities. The results of this evaluation are reflected in the table above. Coincidentally, the three uses that ranked lowest in the survey (dog park, tennis courts and basketball courts) are likely not allowed under FEMA guidance, so they have been excluded from the proposed program for the site. The remaining 15 uses form the basis of the proposed program for the site. Through a DOT grant, a bike path is being designed to run primarily along the river to the north of the site.

The tentative proposed program would be located on the 42 acre portion, except for a town bike path that would traverse the southern portion of the entire parcel to form a loop with the DOT bike path. It is currently expected that FEMA will require that the bike paths and any roads will have to be made of a permeable material. The proposed uses are:

1. Town bike path – about a mile long (to join with DOT bike path)
2. Building with bathroom facilities
3. Parking area(s) (maybe two lots for 50-100 cars total—ballpark, can change)
4. River access/lookout sites
5. Picnic area(s)
6. Open event space
7. Roofed pavilion (no walls)
8. Playground
9. Athletic fields (2)
10. Small agricultural plots
11. Access roads
12. Pedestrian paths
13. Seasonal skating
14. Other similar parkland amenities

#### 4. Economic Development Committee Survey Results

Responses to the 2015 EDC survey garnered similar opinions to those discussed above. These suggestions included creation of more public spaces and making the Town more pedestrian-friendly. EDC Report, page 9. Bike paths were also recognized as an amenity that should be pursued further. EDC Report page 50. Question 5 of the EDC survey asked for suggestions of events not currently offered in the region that might attract visitors to the region. The primary areas of interest include

uses contemplated by the proposed program for the Spruces, such as festivals (music, art, farming, food and green), outdoor recreation including a bike path and utilizing the river, and sports facilities that are independent of Williams College. EDC Report Appendix A, Summary of Town Survey Results, Question 5, page 64. (EDC Report, 2015) The final EDC report includes the recommendation that the town encourage the expansion of bike trails in the Northern Berkshire region to include Williamstown. EDC Report page 50.

### 5. Age Friendly Community Survey Results

Finally, the Age Friendly survey conducted by the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission asked how important is it to you to have the following public facilities in your community, the 127 Williamstown responses showed the following were selected as 'important' among the options listed on the survey:

Natural areas near my home 87.29%;

Public parks with benches, shade, smooth walking paths, etc. 83.48%;

Separate pathways for bicyclists and pedestrians 76.99%

Well maintained and safe parks within walking distance of my home 76.79%

As explained in more detail below, the Committee is currently conducting site surveys and a wetlands delineation of the areas to become a park, and then will develop plans and cost estimates for the implementation of the different elements of the park. The SLUC has proposed that a bike and pedestrian path would go around the perimeter of the Spruces property and the other park amenities would be concentrated on the 42 acres of the property where the mobile home park was located. The remaining approximately 75 acres of the Spruces property would remain in its current agricultural or woodland use.

It should also be noted that the SLUC planning is being conducted in tandem with a separate bike and walking path project under a grant from the Department of Transportation (DOT) (the DOT Bike Path Project). The DOT Bike Path Project in Williamstown is a proposed path for bike and pedestrian use that would have a western terminus in the vicinity of the intersection of Syndicate Road and Route 7 and go easterly about 2.5 miles tracking the south side of the Hoosac River. This segment would end at an eastern terminus on the Spruces property near the Williamstown – North Adams town line. A related DOT project would eventually continue the bike and pedestrian path into North Adams to join with the Ashwilticook trail. The Williamstown segment of this path is already in design and a 25% design hearing is expected in January 2017. Construction funds for the

Williamstown segment are approved for fiscal year 2018. The DOT Bike Path would go along the northern perimeter of the Spruces property. The SLUC proposed program includes a bike and pedestrian path that would go along the southern perimeter of the Spruces property and form a loop with the DOT Bike Path.

The proposed program for the site has elements that would serve all population groups and so would serve the entire population of Williamstown. Bike paths and walking paths would be used by all ages, from infants in strollers to bikers and joggers of all ages to seniors taking walks in a flat and beautiful setting. The playground would provide a new venue for parents to take their children. The playing fields and other athletic spaces would be used by teams throughout town. The Williamstown Youth Center notes that there is a substantial need for more playing fields beyond those at its location by the elementary school. The new fields would be accessible by bike and walking from the centers of town. The event space and pavilion would be available for markets and concerts to be enjoyed by all. The picnic areas and river access points would be used by anyone who wants to spend some recreational time with a view of the river and the Mt. Greylock range. Community garden lots (probably without fences) could be used by any resident. As noted, the elements of the proposed program reflect the community preferences as indicated on the results of the Spruces survey results summarized above.

### C) Management Needs, Potential Changes of Use

In regards to specific recommendations for future land conservation priorities the GIS analysis highlights the conservation value of two significant privately owned pieces of property in South Williamstown and two significant Williams College owned parcels along the Taconic Range, the former Williams College Ski Area and particularly the Hopkins Memorial Forest. This tract owned by Williams College has the highest conservation value of any unprotected parcel in the community.

Hopkins Forest contains high elevation ridge-top land on the Taconic Crest. It contains BioMap2 endangered species habitat. It is composed almost entirely of CAPS top 50% habitat, including a large amount of CAPS top 10% habitat. It contains very high quality aquatic habitat. It has excellent trails. It contains coniferous stands and forest that has not been cleared since the 1830s. And, although this lies outside the main parcel, Hopkins forest also contains the Beinecke Stand, one of the only intact pre-colonial forest stands in town. It is adjacent to conserved land to the south. It is also the largest unprotected undeveloped parcel left in Williamstown, even if only the main parcel is

considered. In short, Hopkins Forest has all of the important conservation attributes identified by the GIS analysis.

As to the Spruces property, the current SLUC planning consists of the surveys, planning and cost estimating necessary to continue progress towards the implementation of the park elements that will ultimately be selected. The final selected program will have to be designed around regulatory limitations on use, such as wetlands and flood control requirements, and one of the purposes of the planning will be to make sure the design complies with those requirements.

The investigative work, studies and plan development were initiated in 3Q 2016 and are proposed to be completed by late 2016 or early 2017 so that the results can be used to seek authorization for selected elements from Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds at Town Meeting in May 2017. The work underway includes fieldwork on wetlands, site surveys, mapping and the development of conceptual and schematic plans with related cost estimates. The program includes community and public meetings. Applications for CPA funds are due to the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) in December 2016. The preparation of conceptual and schematic plans, with associated cost estimates for implementation, would allow for future decisions on funding the implementation of the different components of the plans. The SLUC contemplates that the final plan would be implemented in phases over the course of several years.

## 8) Community Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives set out below were derived from the public participation process presented in section 6 above. Action plans are presented in section 9.

Goal 1: Ensure resource protection for lands with priority environmental and visual value

- A. Identify priority areas for protection
- B. Ensure protection of priority lands, including by working with private landowners
- C. Ensure good stewardship of town-owned open space and parklands
- D. Ensure protection of drinking water supplies
- E. Diligently protect lands subject to Wetlands Protection Act and River Protection Act

Goal 2: Develop and maintain recreational bikeways and walking paths accessible to the community

- A. Protect and improve existing bikeways and foot pathways
- B. Develop new bikeways and foot pathways as opportunities arise
- C. Increase linkages between bikeways and foot pathways
- D. Enhance public information on bikeways and foot pathways
- E. Ensure ADA access as required or practical

Goal 3: Support agricultural land preservation

- A. Work with agricultural community on open space preservation options
- B. Support farming in the local economy

Goal 4: Develop and maintain access to waterways

- A. Maintain existing waterway access locations
- B. Identify proposed locations for increased waterway access

Goal 5: Ensure adequate stewardship resources and funding

- A. Develop and implement management plans as appropriate
- B. Develop partnerships and volunteer networks
- C. Research grants and other sources of funding
- D. Utilize CPA funding as available

## 9) Five Year Action Plan

This 5- year action plan outlines and prioritizes goals and actions with a proposed timetable for each open space and recreation goal and objective. Some of the following goals, objectives and actions are subject to funding and appropriation. The actions should be reviewed annually, updated, and reevaluated.

### *Goal 1: Ensure resource protection for lands with priority environmental and visual value*

- A. Identify priority areas for protection
  - 1. Update inventory of lands prioritized for habitat, watershed, viewshed and other protections
  - 2. Continue to work with partner organizations to prioritize protection of identified lands, especially critical private and Williams College owned parcels along the Taconic Ridgeline
- B. Ensure protection of priority lands, including by working with private landowners
  - 1. Maintain and increase protection of Hopkins Forest and the Taconic Ridgeline
  - 2. Promote education on state preservation programs (e.g. 61A)
- C. Ensure good stewardship of town-owned open space and parklands
  - 1. Conduct periodic inspections of town owned lands and identify maintenance needs
  - 2. Identify and obtain resources (personnel and funding) for public land maintenance, including street trees.
- D. Ensure protection of drinking water supplies
  - 1. Develop plan to evaluate adequacy of wellhead protection programs
  - 2. Enforce wellhead protection and other drinking water protection requirements
- E. Diligently protect lands subject to Wetlands Protection Act and River Protection Act
  - 1. Enforce laws through permitting and inspections

### *Goal 2: Develop and maintain recreational bikeways and walking paths accessible to the community*

- A. Protect and improve existing bikeways and foot pathways
  - 1. Periodically inspect and maintain bikeways
  - 2. Periodically inspect and maintain foot pathways
- B. Develop new bikeways and foot pathways as opportunities arise
  - 1. Develop The Spruces as a recreational resource
    - a. Develop baseline information for future planning
    - b. Develop proposals for phased implementation of park features

- c. Implement approved plans
  - 2. Implement 'Complete Streets' principles where applicable
  - 3. Investigate feasibility of bike lane on Water Street/Route 43
- C. Increase linkages between bikeways and foot pathways
  - 1. Support the expansion of the Ashwilticook trail through North Adams to Williamstown
  - 2. Support the bikeway construction from Syndicate Road to North Adams line
- D. Enhance public information on bikeways and foot pathways
  - 1. Develop and publish maps and brochures on bikeways and foot pathways
- E. Ensure ADA access as required or practical
  - 1. Incorporate accessibility into designs as required or practical

*Goal 3: Support agricultural land preservation*

- A. Work with agricultural community on open space preservation options
  - 1. Ensure local farmers are aware of state preservation programs and assist those who wish to participate
- B. Support farming in the local economy
  - 1. Agricultural Commission to identify steps the Town can take to maintain farms
  - 2. Support the farmers market as a way to assist local farmers
  - 3. Help local institutions and restaurants implement buy-local programs

*Goal 4: Develop and maintain access to waterways*

- A. Maintain existing waterway access locations
  - 1. Periodically inspect access locations and maintain as necessary
- B. Identify proposed locations for increased waterway access
  - 1. Evaluate options for additional access points such as Linear Park and Mt. Hope Park

*Goal 5: Ensure adequate stewardship resources and funding*

- A. Develop and implement management plans as appropriate
  - 1. Prepare management plans and review annually
  - 2. Annually review adequacy of town human and financial resources for public land maintenance
- B. Develop partnerships and volunteer networks
  - 1. Work with Williams Outing Club, HOOWRA, WRLF and other entities to coordinate efforts
- C. Research grants and other sources of funding

1. Identify and apply for applicable grants to promote OSRP objectives
- D. Utilize CPA funding as available
1. Apply for CPA funds as projects are prepared

10) Public Comments

## 11) References

The planning process relied heavily on the work previously completed during other planning efforts in Williamstown. Further other historical works and documents were utilized and summarized below.

- *Brooks, RRR, Williamstown the First 250 Years*
- *Berkshire Regional Planning, Sustainable Berkshires: A Regional Plan for Berkshire County (2014)*
- *Dethier D., DeSimone D., & Oelkers E. , The Surficial Deposits and Hydrogeology of Williamstown, Massachusetts (1989)*
- *Williamstown Economic Development Committee, Strategies for Economic Growth in Williamstown, Massachusetts (2015)*
- *Williamstown Housing Needs Assessment (2013)*
- *Williamstown Open Space and Recreation Plan (2005)*
- *Williamstown Master Plan (2000)*
- *United States Census & American Community Survey Data (200, 2010, & 2013)*