

9.27.07

To: Hallowell Comprehensive Planning Committee  
From: Hallowell Open Space Planning Working Group  
Re: OSP concerns East of highway

Thank you for this opportunity to highlight some of the concerns that have risen to the top as we have met with Hallowell citizens in the last few months. We will focus tonight on issues specific to the area of the City that is east of I-95. We will bring forward concerns about the area west of I-95 at next week's meeting, and some of the overarching concerns, such as general watershed protection, we will present in the draft plan in the near future.

- *Safe walking to the elementary school and around the community.* Concern: There is only one sidewalk route to the new elementary school and it requires children south of Winthrop Street to cross that busy street 2 x, with poor visibility below the crest of the hill. Recommendation: The OSP will recommend that a present City committee (e.g. Public safety) or a new entity (e.g. a Bike/Ped committee) be charged with planning safe bike, sidewalk and pedestrian routes through town. Consideration of bike/ped needs and safety should be integrated into all road repair, paving, maintenance and planning decisions, and the City should work with DOT and the Turnpike authority to increase bike/ped safety on all bridges and state roads in Hallowell.
- *Maintaining the open space buffer between Hallowell and Augusta.* Concern: The present combination of undeveloped fields, woodlands and hills that lie north of Winthrop Street and east of the highway, including the Stevens School open space, provides a number of significant benefits to Hallowell. We could lose those benefits to development. Some of the benefits of the Howard Hill buffer are, it:
  - helps define Hallowell as its own distinct community with unique character and scale, separate from Augusta;
  - buffers Hallowell from lights, noise, traffic and dust of Augusta's intense development;
  - treats air pollution and provides watershed protection from erosion and flooding;
  - in concert with some undeveloped land in Augusta, it provides unfragmented habitat for wildlife such as deer, turkeys, grouse, other birds, mammals and amphibians;
  - The informal walking trails that are part of the Stevens School parcel could serve as nature laboratory for the Elementary School, as well as welcome green space for those living and working in the Stevens School annex once it is redeveloped. The present footpaths are currently part of larger regional system of informal trails, connecting with Augusta;
  - Provides an attractive entrance to the City from the Manchester areaHoward Hill and its adjacent fields, woods and wetlands could provide an attractive backdrop to small-scale, low-impact development along Winthrop Street, while maintaining the above benefits for Hallowell. Recommendations:

the Ordinance Revision Committee and Comprehensive Plan Committee could craft development ordinances or zoning to maintain the buffer North of Winthrop street and East of I-95, but still allow reasonable development, proportionate to Hallowell, on Winthrop St. Also, we recommend that options to preserve the present open space parcel at the Stevens School be pursued by the City committee working with the State on this matter, and that the Conservation Committee's trails subcommittee be charged with planning and preserving trails.

- *The Waterfront park.* The OSP process revealed support for a safe, attractive, park with access to the Kennebec River at the north end of downtown. The OSP working group supports the general concept for the park as it has been presented, and supports the plan for the impact and the needs of the Rail Trail access and the Waterfront Park to be considered together. Concerns: in general the OSP working group is concerned about significant increases to motorized traffic on the River, that may arise from a variety of regional initiatives, but we are not sure yet about the proper venue to address these concerns.
- *Vaughan Field.* Concern: There has been no decision regarding how to protect this resource in perpetuity. Recommendation: Vaughan Field be zoned Open Space will the City decides how to protect it in perpetuity. We also support the City's plan to name a group to oversee development and implementation of a park plan for Vaughan Field.
- *Exxon/Mobil tank farm.* The time is now to take steps to determine if Exxon Mobil would like to transfer this land or partner with the City to use this facility to tie the Rail Trail, Waterfront and Kennebec River shore together. The OSP working group has been told that there has been some interest expressed by Exxon/Mobil in the past. We are not sure yet what ultimate use would be appropriate. People cut across it to fish from the old jetty now. It has multiple possibilities: a naturalized area, dog park, waterfront/rail trail parking, snow dump, Tree Board's memorial tree park or other possibilities. Recommendation: The Open Space Plan will designate this as an area of potential open space and recreation interest. If appropriate the Comprehensive Plan could support this designation. The City could designate the HCC to contact Exxon/Mobil to determine if there is interest in pursuing this issue. If so, the City should express interest in the parcel and ask the Maine DEP to conduct the toxic waste evaluation which is necessary before Exxon/Mobil could transfer the land.
- *Connections.* The draft OSP envisions combinations of off-road and on-road trails between open spaces East of the highway, such as the Rail Trail, Vaughan Field, Stevens School and the Elementary School. Recommendation: the HCC will establish a trails subcommittee to pursue off-road trails, and would work with other City entities (see safe walking item, above) and willing landowners to make safe connections.
- *Vaughan Woods.* The Vaughan Woods is a gift that our community is privileged to have access to. The Woods are strongly tied to Hallowell's identity and provide many benefits to our community. Concerns: the Woods may be overused, certainly usage has increased significantly in recent years, and users do not all understand that the Woods are privately owned and that continued public access depends on responsible behavior and constant caretaking. Recommendations: At

this time no steps should be taken that would increase usage, such as signage, maps, publicity or formal connections to the Rail Trail. The Vaughan Homestead Foundation should be invited to be involved in dog owner behavior plans being developed by the City. The HCC should continue to work with the Foundation to provide volunteer assistance for trail maintenance. Additional open space in Hallowell should be protected and made available to the public to reduce the pressure on the Vaughan Woods. Land adjacent to or nearby the Vaughan Woods should be considered for open space protection, if landowners are willing.